

LOVE IN THE WEAVING

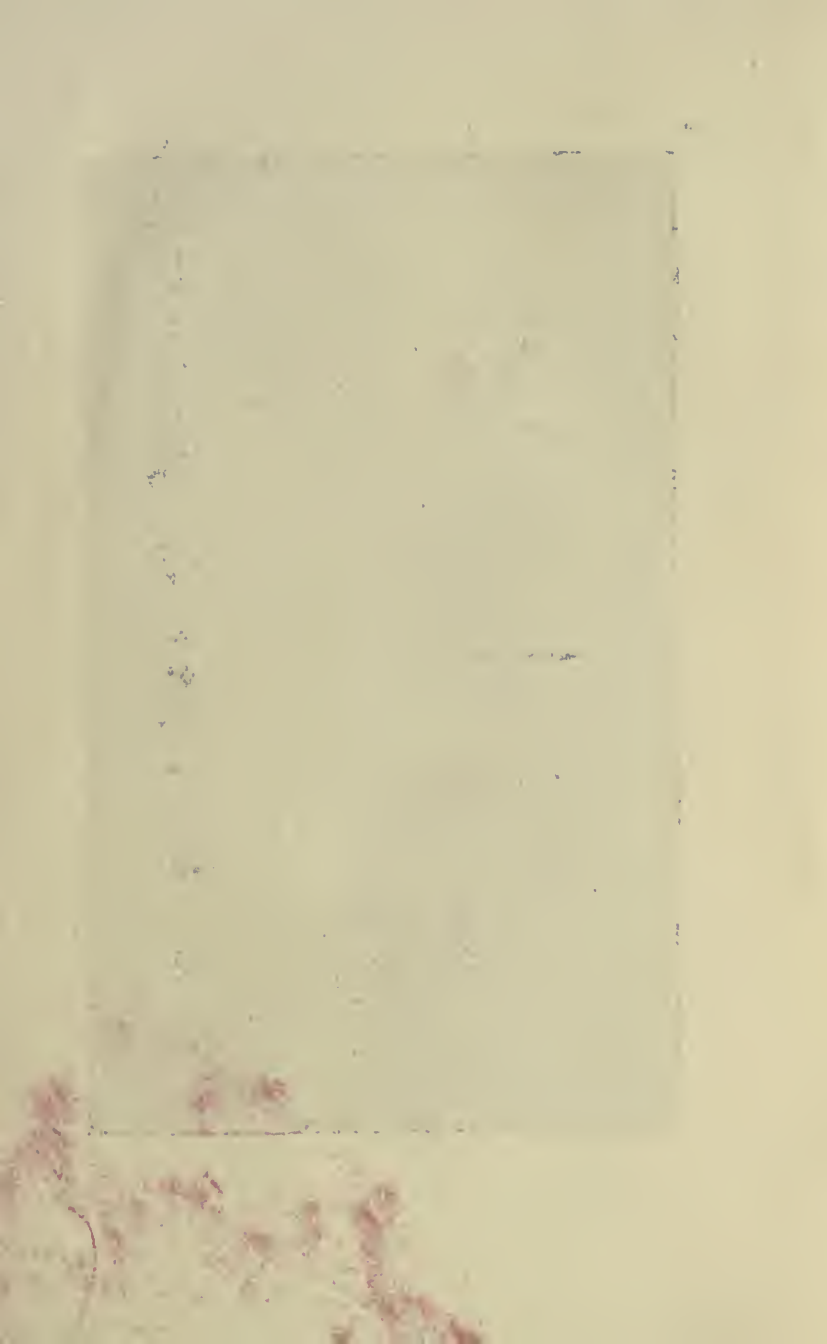
EDITH HALL ORTHWEIN



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LOVE IN THE WEAVING

By
EDITH HALL ORTHWEIN

*To love is ever to thirst, and to thirst is
ever to pray. Thus love is prayer, and they
who love best pray best.*



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By
EDITH HALL ORTHWEIN.

To
MY MOTHER,

Mrs. R. G. Rombauer, whose love I wear upon my
heart,—a jewel of so rare a setting that it holds
the coral flame of morning and the sun-
woven mist of evening in the soft
wonder of its beauty.

FOREWORD.

The lights in the studio burned low. Each candle gave forth little restless, tired, jerking flickers, as if the effort of brightening the long shadowy room had wearied it. Is it not always a struggle to bring the light into the gloom?

There were pictures everywhere. But one, only, seemed to fill the place with its presence. It hung in the very end of the room, far away from the windows, in a niche made by a deep recess in the wall. It was a picture of a woman reclining upon a wide, fur-covered couch. The beauty of her bared bosom was half exposed as she lay with her arm beneath her head. Her eyes were filled with the great mother-love of her being, a new rapture, partially veiled in a cloudy haze, the wonder of the artist's brush, seemed to float beneath her vision. At the foot of the couch knelt the figure of a man, and upon his face the light of a great love was aglow. It was a wonderful picture—*all of life* shaded upon a canvas not four feet square. It was love, face to face with the joy of its passion. You could almost see the hearts a-quiver, and feel the great ebb and flow of the love-tide that had swept them into one.

Beneath the picture sat a woman with great hungry eyes. All of her young life had been passed in an environment that would have warped the

womanhood, in a soul less pure. Her eyes were fixed upon the picture. Was it not herself portrayed there—and yet could that be she—that wonderful creature with the love-haze about her? Surely love was all. Over her neck stole soft kisses—they burned into her soul. Suddenly, from out the fire of love's embrace the meaning of life seemed to glow over and around her and she bowed her head and wept.

It was a great step to take. It would carry her out upon the ocean of the world's contempt. What was the world to her—an artist's model? It threw her crumbs, to be sure—but ah, she was starving for the whole of love's loaf. God help a woman when she loves!

A great tender, pitying influence hovered over her, there alone in the darkness. The candles had gone out and the place seemed held in the iron hands of an awful stillness that fain would choke out her very life.

She loved—how she loved him! Was that right? What was wrong? How could she tell, when she loved him so?

She could never be his wife. The words sung in her ears—"his wife." How the world honored the title! A quivering denial spoke within her breast. The world—it was the world again she was thinking about. How dared it stand in judgment of her love?

His wife—to stand abreast with him and face life—to smile in the rocking gale—to feel the blood of pride rush through the veins—surely this was best. But to gain this, she must hurt another, perhaps.

She might hurt herself, but another? And this is all the law of conscience. Did she hurt another? The man loved her—she knew it. Had he not been strong when she was weak? Had he not been true to that unloved wife—silent that she might not be hurt?

Down upon the floor the unhappy woman huddled; the spirit seemed crushed within her. Suddenly she stood erect, and through the room crept the moonlight, and her face was as the face of an angel. Strength and love,—understanding, was ablaze in her eyes. She had made her choice. Would he, her lover, let her abide by it?

Her breasts quivered—as if a child's lips were wet upon them—and the world would call that child a bastard. But would it not be endowed from the store-house of love's richest treasure? Was not such a heritage enough? The undesired child only, is a bastard, though he sleep in a satin-lined cradle of wedlock. Her babe would be the babe of love. Ah, God, would her lover let her live? And she wept again and waited there in the moon-glow—and unseen hands bathed her brow from the great alabaster box of pity.

Is it not a struggle of the soul in the body, in life to find the way?

Yet when the fatigue of the journey is over and we look back from the golden summit and see the beginning from the end, will not bitterness of judgment pass from us? For we shall see the pattern of the weaving. Will it matter what road we traveled, and must not each soul draw its own pattern, after all?

There are some plants that mature beneath the surface of the earth and attain perfection hidden away by themselves; and the most beautiful flower of the Alps—does it not bloom high among the rocks, far from human life? May not souls among the rocks of worldly criticism blossom also?

There was one who read the story of his life—all his thoughts, his words, the things he had done and left undone. And as he read he knew what was good and what was ill; everything was clear; at last he knew himself. And while he pondered, one stood beside him, grave and calm and sweet. Up into the face which turned toward him touched with the light of immortal joy, he looked and asked:

“When shall I be judged?”

And the answer came, “Thou hast judged thyself!”

Love in the Weaving

CHAPTER I.

I do not know the moment that I awoke to the fact that I was alive. The seed of my soul had been nurtured upon life's sunny slope, albeit the shadows hung over, they but wrapped the too fierce glare of my happy youth in a fragrant coolness, that promised well for my future. Some lives gradually unfold as a flower, others in a night. I spread my wings under the soft tender influence of a mother's voice, made music by sorrow's touch upon the harp-strings of her soul.

She had bound her bruise in ivy leaves, hoping from her loving thought of me that I would never know the cruel hurt of her sadness, but children learn and ruthlessly, in their innocence, unbind half healed wounds. My mother's sorrow was of such a nature that it only set her soul to singing and her eyes to feasting upon the beautiful; so surely are some heart aches, only the opening minor chords to a symphony of passionate, poetic song radiance.

Under her sweet charm I lived and she, my mother, set the notes of my life in tune, that I should sing some day even as she. I was ever a dreaming child sitting as children will under a

dream-tree of sugar-plums reaching out chubby arms to grasp the frail delight of "sense and touch." It never occurred to me to grow weary of reaching; the weariness of life comes later and not with sturdy child-feet. All of my young life was spent under the dear guidance of the mother-hand, and such a gentle hand.

We lived in a small town favored by nature with a setting of forest, far from the strife and noise of cities. Surely in the quiet stillness, repose of mind is found and there my mother sought her work and did sewing for the village folk. I have seen her fingers tremble, as she stretched them out, after too much pushing in and out of stitches and then she would fondle back my hair and say, the tired ache of joints had passed away from mingling with my curls.

The song birds were a flutter in the garden about our little cottage home, the green trees and bushes waxed bold in their nodding as if with their slender leaf-fingers they would accompany the birds in their song service. 'Twas the budding month of April, and the earth was full of sweet promises for May—her bosom rose and fell with enthusiasm over-eager to cast her sweet blossoms adrift through lane and meadow.

A part of this beautiful leaf-growing day my mother sat by the latticed window of the cottage. Not a part of that April day because of future hope reflected in the deep of her eyes, but because she seemed to have caught an eternal spring in their depths, and the soft fragrance of promising bud and flower was as a memory ever abloom upon her face.

The gold of her hair danced in the sunlight and all was harmony and peace in our home nest, so sheltered beneath leafy foliage, whose richness lay heavy upon the slanting roof. A myriad of vines trailed tender blossoms liberally over weather-worn boards, till tiny windows were framed in a mingling of colors.

"Mother, Professor Camden is at the door. May he come in?" She dropped her work and rose to give welcome.

"Don't rise, madam; my call seems forced now I stand before you, but as I was passing, a voice in the garden held me captive. I am a worn-out singer, madam, brought to your village by the kind insistency of friends. I am like the tree by your gate post. I see you have cut the branches to save the root, and so I must cut the branches of my ambition to let the blood go back and give vigor to the life-root of my being. Your village is full of the youth- tonic, and I hope for much, but the days grow long to me. I am restless as this April morning, so eager to cover the earth with leaf and blossom."

I took his hat in response to the request for hospitality in my mother's eyes and then left them alone and once more became a part of the great song-chorus astir in our garden. It was near noon when my mother's caller left, and he took with him her promise to send me to him, that he might train my voice. That I had a voice I never knew until that never to be forgotten April morning. I thought it natural to sing. I had always considered myself as one of the bird-chorus that flocked through the woods and had aped their notes and

trills until sometimes I had led my shy friends astray.

I could see a big wonderful gladness in my mother's eyes as she repeated the conversation of Professor Camden. 'Twas as if she hoped through me to sing her gladness to the world. Poor mother, so shut away in the walls of memory and yet so happy there and so willing to open the door of her heart to let me, it's one wee bairn go forth. When we come to a turn in the road of our life I have noticed we generally stop for retrospection, and as we prepared our simple meal that far-away April day my tongue was busy. I was to be a singer perhaps, and the father I loved was not there to share my joy.

"Let us go to the picture, mother," I whispered as we finished putting the dainty tea set upon the table. Dishes were our only luxury, and the plainness of our meals was forgotten as we fingered delicately vine-traced cups and saucers.

I could see her thought was mine, and, taking me by the hand, we went to the shrine of our love. It was a small print in a tiny frame and kept in the drawer of her desk, where she would sit whenever leisure could be indulged in. How earnestly and shyly she had made me love that strong true face, with its dark eyes and hair worn well off the forehead. I knew every feature by heart, the tired lines about the eyes, the serious droop to the mouth, the whiteness of the forehead, and the furrows of character marked there.

My father! and in my heart I knew he was noble and true. He was not dead, she had told me that,

but nearer to her sorrow I could not creep. My lips were dumb: I could only stand before our love shrine in awe, but silent.

"Am I like him, mother?" I asked.

"Yes, dearie. Thank God for that, else I could not live. I see him in you. I kiss him in you, child,—my life burns to him in you. You, my Elsa, are my one fair love—blossom, and he gave you to me, to make all the rest of my life a prayer. Oh, child! never love or else let me guide your love to happier fruition."

"Did he sing, mother?" I said.

"No, child, but he loved and so sang the sweetest song ever sung in life."

"Did he love you so well, mother, and yet he never longs to clasp me to his breast?"

A great blindness of tears hid her eyes, and, gently but reluctantly, I pulled her back from the desk and closed the lid. What was my girl curiosity compared to this grief in her eyes?

Our cottage was hemmed in by forest trees, we could hear their sighing as we sat mute and thoughtful over our tea. Gradually sadness left us as the moan of swaying branches ceased and twilight deepened.

Professor Camden had come to the village two weeks before, and the place was a-gossip about him. He was a man past sixty, and showed a fretful unwillingness to acknowledge even those sixty years, so eager was he in his chosen vocation. That he was a great teacher from New York we never doubted. The way he had helped the church choir and the ready understanding of notes and phrases

impressed us so favorably that even in so short a time Professor Camden had found his niche. But he was a sick man and hid himself away in an old brick house *let furnished*. One servant attended to his needs, while he rested and waited for returning vigor that he might again take up his work,—and to-morrow I would begin voice study with this man so soon respected and loved by us all.

CHAPTER II.

I was up early the following morning,—the purple lilacs that had found their way even to the casement of my bedroom window were already aflutter in the early morning breeze. Our cottage was very close to the road, just a hedge of green in the front separated us from the village walk, but on either side the far country spread out invitingly. I remember kneeling by the window ledge in my white night robe with both elbows spread wide upon the sill, as I drew in the fragrance of the nodding flowers. Here and there were groups of brown sparrows chirping merrily and the blue, blue sky above.

The front door opened, and I knew my mother was astir. She was a small woman, with a bright alertness about her that gave even a greater charm to her fair beauty. How I loved her, my mother. Her eyes searched the garden beneath my window till I grew fearful of a hidden foe, so seriously was she bending over the flower beds.

“Betsy,—Betsy,” floated up to me—“Betsy, where are you?” and then I knew it was our household pet that she sought, a large black Tommy that we had quite insulted by naming Betsy.

It would seem as if in his dignity he resented his feminine title, for he never came when called,

only after he had switched his tail savagely, then he would notice us, and so I decided that the name of Betsy was not to his liking—but Betsy he remained nevertheless.

"Betsy, Betsy," my mother continued to call until she reached a gap in the hedge, then she turned to perceive Betsy and me at the same time. "Why, Elsa, child, you'll catch cold by the open window;" but sending her a kiss from the tips of my fingers I jested her fears away and pointed out Betsy peering indignantly at her from the west walk. "I've been searching half an hour," she called up to me as she caught the cat in her arms. "He was out all night, Elsa, and I know he is half starved. I'll just take him in to his milk."

How much life held for me this morning, and how eagerly my eyes feasted upon everything. Each bud and blossom drew my enthusiasm, and oh, the breath of the outdoor air penetrated my being until hands grew restless and feet nervous to be up and doing, and eyes eager to find the visions that youth and hope had set there. I was quite overcome at what the day should bring forth. I was a village lass, and so there was an innocent pride stirring in my heart that I was to study with the New York Professor.

"Beautiful, sublime!" I raved to myself as I rose from the casement and hurried to my morning toilet. It was a simple one, and I remember the dress that I put on even now. Pale blue lawn, made with narrow tucks at the bottom and off the shoulders at the neck and short in the sleeve, with a ribbon belt at the waist. The birds continued to

chirp outside, but I had forgotten them in the adjusting of ribbons and tying of shoes. My fingers flew in and out. I curled and twisted rebellious locks, then gave a pinch to my cheeks to send the color there, for I was a pale white girl, and I knew my mother liked to see the roses.

I found the tea kettle singing on the stove, and my mother busying about the tiny kitchen when I entered.

"Isn't it a wonderful world, mother dear?" I cried out as I cut the bread into thin slices, and then put it on a fork and held it over the glowing coals and watched the delicate brown colorings gradually spread over the whiteness. "Isn't it a wonderful world?" A smile of sympathy with my youthful enthusiasm grew on her face, and her eyes lit up under the spell of mine. Together we toasted and buttered the bread, and Betsy, now well fed, rubbed against our dresses. I can see the flushed eager face of my mother, eager even as mine, and we *were*, eager and hopeful, mother and I. The little cottage was a fairy bower, and she was a queen sending forth her fairy princess out to the edge of the world, to catch the first echo of its power. How good the coffee tasted and the few silver pieces, how they glistened at our morning feast as we chatted on, over what was to be. Then came the tying of bonnet strings, the quick, yet lingering good-bye, and the last glimpse of her face as I hurried over the hill. I knew her thoughts back there with the dishes and her sewing, and I hurried on fast and faster over eager to reach the old brick house—*let furnished*.

He was there on the steps to greet me—Professor Camden. The long gray locks about his face, his tall bent figure holding on to the railing. There was a kindness about his mouth that made me feel at ease with him at once. I had thought to sing by the piano just inside the window, but he led me into the garden to a bench overrun with stray vines. I had thought to sing immediately, but he only talked that first morning, and I listened as to a fairy tale. The trees were full of leaf, and a heavy south breeze brought sweet odors about us.

“Life is one big picture, is it not, Mademoiselle Elsa?” he said.

“Oh! isn’t it wonderful, Professor Camden?” The words fell from my lips so quickly that I flushed at my temerity, in speaking them.

“Mother and I were marveling at it only an hour ago,” I timidly added. “And we must get into the picture, you and I,” he continued, not noticing the interruption.

“Get into the picture and feel the soft crooning of the trees and respond to the sunbeams sending their messages of light through the sky. It is only as we become harmonious in the picture that we hear the voices. I am an old man, older even than you think, and the voices have ever led me into all that is beautiful. Listen for the voices, Mademoiselle, and obey them.”

“I will—I will——” I cried, scarce knowing what he meant but led on by the rich cadence of a peculiarly low-pitched voice. It was a short talk. All too soon was it over, and my face once more turned

homeward ere I knew it, but it was an hour that has lingered with me through life, that first glimpse of the dear Professor at the old house—*let furnished*, with its neglected garden so overgrown with bud and blossom.

CHAPTER III.

Step by step our work grew. We spent hour after hour by the piano, sometimes both silent, intent upon a bird trill of soft notes outside the window, and then I would shape my lips and trill as the bird while the old man clapped his hands for joy, like a child. "The technical part is tedious," he often repeated to me, "but you are a good pupil, and you are young and will be a great artist," he muttered softly to himself many times as the lessons progressed.

"I will be an artist!" I cried; "you shall not be mistaken in me. You shall see!" Then we would forget the practice, while he told of the big city to which I should go with him, of his studio and the yet unexplored world of song I was to enter.

"After long study you will bring the country lanes, the brown sparrows of the wood, even the sweet odors of rose-petals to the city folk in your voice. The wonderful gift, child,—the wonderful gift!" and in this mood of triumph his long, slim fingers drew deep chords full of passion and appeal from the white keys of the piano. At their bidding I entered the realm of another world. All the conflicting emotions within my breast became one intense harmonious strain of melody that thrilled my being. My heart was still, for fear of dispelling the rapture that held me, such power lay in his thin fingers.

Sometimes I would slip home quite tired out, as if I could bear no more, but I was happy these days, they were like jewels, and I held them to my heart, forgetting all but the radiant beauty of my gems. In my wildest moments when I dared really to believe in my genius, I would bow my soul in humility—for as I grew, an humbleness came, that sometimes was as despair and then as a stepping stone to success. The days passed on, the Professor was more bent, older and more haggard, but not one morning would he let me miss. He would straighten up like a soldier on my approach and murmur that he had a trust to fulfill. As the days waxed warmer, he seemed more feeble and his hands trembled on the keys. I was as a daughter to him, and the sweetness of a definite friendship grew up between us. "Little Elsa," he would say very tenderly, "you will have much in life. God!—you will have much." I began to believe his words, and my tones took on a surer sweetness and greater volume.

There was a hidden excitement these days between my mother and myself. We did not know what the excitement meant as yet, but there was brooding over us a mysterious silence that led us often hand in hand to the shrine of our love, and a glad light was growing in my mother's eyes. Before the mystery we were dumb, as if a holy thing was taking root, and we could see the leaves and tender shoots spring into being. But eyes speak though lips are dumb. Tired fingers pressed the needle in and out, weariness fell away as a garment, and joy reigned between us.

CHAPTER IV.

The fire blazed low upon the hearth, it was the early fall, and there was a crispness abroad that sent me eagerly indoors to the charmed circle of the fire-light. I sat alone in the old brick house, *let furnished*, to Professor Camden. It was a bare uninviting place, and the furniture was stiff and unfriendly of aspect. During the summer months the garden blossoms had pushed even into the windows of the dull brick of the house, and the interior bareness had been forgotten because the green life of the garden had beckoned one to forget all else, but that the sun was warm and loving and the red geraniums looked so proud in their summer dress. Day after day I had opened and closed the garden gate and with eager feet sought the piano standing near the porch window which was left open, that I might enter.

Sometimes the room was empty, the Professor was perhaps at his desk in the bay windowed room on the opposite side of the hall, that divided the house. When he was not there with his eager eyes ever alert to begin our lesson, my fingers would seek the keys, even as his, and find comradeship by contact. Sometimes he would silently enter the room and surprise me in these flights of imagination. He seemed to find pleasure in being led into

the regions of melody at the sweet bidding of my fingers.

The emptiness of our study room never impressed me—for the glad flower-world was outside and the piano here. Now the fall had come, the windows were closed, and the blossoms dead,—yet no—they were even here in the great log upon the fire-place, and so, still the stiffness of black-haired furniture was unseen in the voice of the singing-log. I was so absorbed in study the long summer days that I but half noticed the pinched look about the man who worked so patiently with me those warm sultry hours when the sun drew closer and spent of its fire upon leaf and bud.

I had grown to love him, too, this tall spare man with the deep furrows upon his brow, the ashy pallor of thin lips, and the tired droop of shoulders. I sat alone now in the room, while on the other side of the hall the dear Professor was battling with death. Friendly ghosts of days past crept through the shadows, days spent in song, talks in the garden—I could hear the voice of the man so in harmony with the great picture of life, that he seemed as one with nature, the tired voice, I hear it now.

“Mademoiselle Elsa, to be a singer you must know life, in all its saddening, in all its gladdening phases, love, disappointment, sickness, death, all are given my child to make us great by opening the door of our understanding. Enter Mademoiselle, and the thrill of inspiration will wind itself about your being until it will rise to your call and you will answer, ‘Here am I, send me into whatever realm your song may call you.’”

Ah, the hours I had listened to this man of music—I scarce understood that it was the gates of paradise he would open for me, that he even bade me enter and claim my birth-right. Thus the friendly ghosts of those summer days crept in and out, through the shadows, as I waited by the fire,—alone—waited my mother's summons to that other room, where the voice would soon be but a memory—an echo—gone. In the midst of my reverie the door opened and my mother whispered, "Elsa—sing—sing!" How could I sing, and yet I must for the dear master. I found the piano stool in the now deepening shadows, my fingers sought the white keyboard lovingly, and I struck a chord. The instrument was old but sweet of tone, the autumn night and the dying embers guided me unconsciously, Tosti's "Good-bye" trembled to my lips, softly at first, and then my whole being became one with the spirit of the song.

“Falling leaf, and fading tree,
Lines of white in a sullen sea,
Shadows falling on you and me.”

The wings of a great calm brooded lovingly over me. It was as if I sang to a departing soul, and when "good-bye summer, good-bye" fell upon the air I knew I had come into my own.

I cannot remember how I reached the chamber across the hall, but I found myself there, and the Professor's eyes, alight with joy, were upon me.

"You are a great artist, my child,—you will touch hearts."

He spoke no more, but a sweet peace spread over his countenance; the worn body was at rest. Thus he passed from my life, but he had lived long enough to give me my treasure. We sent him home to waiting friends in his native city, loving hands laid him away, while we wept, my mother and I, and the leaves sang mournfully.

At last the emptiness of the dingy square room was felt and the stiff black furniture grew prominent, yet my fingers stroked it tenderly as I hid it away beneath gray linen covers. Quietly, order was restored to everything, the windows were nailed up, and the little garden gate locked, the keys of the house, *let furnished*, sent back to the attorney that had the renting in charge. I had grown to love the place and with the ardor of youth told my mother I would buy it some day, when my voice brought me money. Then I turned my face homeward for the last time and pondered as I walked under village elms, over the dear Professor, the brick house, and its sad short love story, for it had one, and the conflicting emotions of death and love mingled in my thought as I hurried along under the fast falling shadows of night.

CHAPTER V.

The days now took on a new seriousness—I was young, I believed in everything good and beautiful—life was full of certainties for me. My mother's sorrow had fallen upon me as the dew of heaven, turning to sympathy the seeds of doubt and fear in my heart—sympathy for the ache of dumb things and a love for the growing green life that held so important a place in our little world. My heritage was joy—my mother had willed it so, and youth cannot penetrate too deeply into the caverns of misery, when the great world calls so strongly for the vigor of happiness.

I was sitting on the door-step just as the sun was creeping away in the west memorizing the words of a song, one day, when two strange men came down the road on either side of Mrs. Aiken, the grand dame of the village. They bent toward her, like two wooing swains, so eager were their gestures and so busily did their tongues seem to be flying with words in vivid description of something, an important something, too, it would seem. Their approach sent my heart into my mouth, for I was unused to many callers, and I could see by the frequent glances sent my way that their steps led to our cottage.

Mrs. Theodore Aiken was the mill owner's wife.

She was a tall, well-built woman with shiny black hair and narrow, well-defined features, which gave a stiff primness to her face, her eyes moved constantly as if always seeking and never finding peace—the peace of fulfillment that gives ease to restless nerves. She was president of the ladies sewing circle in the church, she sat with all the committees of organization, and society held to her skirts like a child under the protecting wing of maternal care.

We lived outside the magic circle, and so there was consternation in my breast when this stately lady lifted the latch of the gate and entered our garden, followed by two strangers. One was a middle-aged man with iron gray hair, and a fresh, ruddy complexion, a contrast that attracted me at once, the other was thin and tall and pale and about thirty years of age with great serious black eyes, that in a quiet way seemed to take in the garden and me, in one sweeping glance.

“My—dear—child! I am so glad you are at home!” and Mrs. Aiken rushed effusively up to me and grabbed my hands, book and all. It was drawing on to sundown, the deepening shadows were as caressing arms about me and stilled the wild surging of emotions within. I could feel the blood rushing to my cheeks at her forced friendliness. When my mother came to the door and turned the restless eyes in her direction, there was gratitude from every part of my body.

“My dear Mrs.—Mrs.—?”

“Mrs. Grier,” sweetly put in my mother’s voice, and the quiet tone brought courage to me, my embarrassment fled, I drew myself to my full height,

greeted them all and led the way proudly into our sitting room, where lay my mother's work as she had dropped it on the window ledge at the sound of their voices.

The approaching shadows crept over the ledge on to the carpet, a dull rich luster veiled the big flower pattern of blue, red, and brown. Half a dozen books lay carelessly upon the round center table of mahogany, a valued piece of furniture we had found in an old second-hand shop. The little sash curtains swayed in the breeze and the few chairs were invitingly grouped. Our visitors sat down and I could see the falseness of their approach fade away, as the love atmosphere within penetrated the outer crust of conventionality.

"My dear Mrs. Grier, this is Mr. Alexander, the business manager of the Shaw Company to play at the opera house to-morrow night," said Mrs. Aiken, waving a gloved hand toward the man of ruddy complexion, "and this is Charles Grey, the leading man of the Shaw Company," and the restless eyes turned quickly toward the younger man.

"My daughter, Elsa," said my mother, acknowledging both gentlemen.

I did not know what to do, but bashfully turned my head, a sudden awkwardness seemed to possess me. There were jarring elements at work in the room, and I could feel it in my hands and feet, they were alive with bigness. I became self-conscious under the three pairs of eyes *taking me in*. I shifted from one foot to the other, then in my absorption arranged the blinds closer, and shut the door. Finally, noticing the shadows changing

quickly to real darkness, I eased my inward excitement by leaving the room for the lamp. When I returned its glow revealed a still greater nervousness astir in the little room. The two gentlemen were fingering their hats, smoothing the band and carressing the rim. Mrs. Aiken was sitting bolt upright, fully conscious of her exalted position of spokeswoman. My mother's eyes were roaming from one to the other—a mother bird, aflutter.

“Elsa, dear,” she cried, even before I could reach the table with the lamp. “They want you to sing to-morrow night.” My hand trembled, with a quick movement, I put the lamp on the table and turned questioning eyes on first one and then the other of our callers. Mrs. Aiken came to the rescue.

“Yes, child, Miss Courtland is ill, very ill, and they have sent for a nurse from the city; an understudy will take her part, but in one act the principal scene is at the piano where she sings.”

“And they want you, dear, to carry through this scene,” interrupted my mother, holding both hands out to me.

“And the opening of the opera house will be ruined,” continued Mrs. Aiken, “if you don't help us.”

Sing! I was only a child, alone in the great universe of song, and I felt the weight of the loneliness as I stood in their midst.

“You have a good presence,” said Mr. Alexander, thinking, no doubt, a compliment would help me to gain self-possession and confidence in my ability. The dark eyes of Charles Grey seemed to echo his words, but it was not compliments that I

wanted, it was a voice to bid me into the world of my own, and it echoed to me from the silence, when Mrs. Aiken spoke up impulsively, at a loss how to help the situation, by saying:

"I know you studied with the Professor all summer."

"But can I do it, mother?" I asked, ignoring the other occupants of the room.

"Dearie, you know what the Professor would say if he were here——

"Sing, Mademoiselle Elsa, 'tis the first call for you from the great world-garden."

I knew it was hard for the words to come; it was as if the Professor urged her on, to the trying of wings that might carry me away she knew not where. But she spoke them and then reached for my hand as if to warm the chill about her heart.

"I will do it," I gasped suddenly, the vision of the dear Professor before me. "I will sing."

"Thank you, thank you, Miss Grier?" spoke all three voices at once.

"We rehearse at ten in the morning. We shall expect you," said Mr. Alexander, lowering the tension of the moment to a business-like basis, and Mrs. Aiken, rising, ushered them out of the cottage into the deepening twilight, and mother and I stood tongue-tied on either side of the lamp, groping in the darkness in our endeavor to understand the methods of fate.

CHAPTER VI.

Wednesday, and a cloudy day; yet the sunshine of a joy deep in my heart shines over everything. Wednesday—and the dawn of what for me? The awakening perhaps into all that is beautiful, and I am alive and about to enter the great arena of existence.

Wednesday—I had thought it would never come as I lay restless the long night through, thinking of the morrow—and the dear Professor seemed so near, and at last the quiet entrance of the new day was like the feeding of a hunger unfelt, until the first tint of dawn crept over the hills.

Ah, the relief, the joy and fear that thrilled through my being. To-day the arms of the great world would open wide to receive me, and the thought filled me with madness for the joy of it all. How good God was to me, a little, unknown country girl, and down into my pillow I buried my face while the tumult within my heart plunged onward, deeper through my being! Would the world realize all the happiness she was holding out to me? My heart leaped within me and a prayer lay on my lips as if angel fingers touched them with the sweet oil of gratitude.

Away from the dreaming, past the mountain of fear, on, into the reality, all this passed through

my mind as I hurried through the village streets, and lo! I was in another world, breathing the subtle incense of a darkened theatre. Before me was a picture; I was to enter that picture, and my pulses quivered, my eyes sparkled. The first two acts had been hurried over just to give me the atmosphere of the play, and now the setting of the last act with its two scenes was called, and while hurried changes were taking place Mr. Alexander left my side in the dim foyer and the stage manager, a small red-haired man, slight and wiry of build, but with a keen alertness in all his movements and with many lines marking each feature, took his place. Wilbur Knowles was clever and I was a lucky girl, I found out later, to have had him direct my first rehearsal.

"Very interesting—Miss Grier," he said, as he stretched out in the seat beside me with an abandonment of legs and arms that told me it was real relaxation for him so to stretch them. "Your first rehearsal?"

"Yes, and my first sight of the drama. I have read many dramas, though, and am thoroughly at home in my thought of the scenes."

"To the right, Jim, with that palm," he called to one of the hands, "still farther over, boy," he yelled, sitting up in his seat and waving two long, bony arms that quivered nervously beneath the pink-and-white-striped shirt linen—"that's good, and you, there, to the left with the table—shove it up centre—that's right. There is always something to work one up at a rehearsal, Miss Grier," he said, as he slid back into the old relaxed position.

"How do you like the play, and what do you

think of the understudy? I can't get over how lucky we were to find a girl that could easily pass for her twin. Gee! but it's lucky! Audience never will know that two girls do the same part and the whole ending would let down if the singing were dropped out. I tell you I am glad, that head in the air, Madam Aiken, thought of you and piloted the old gentleman down your way.

"Clever little girl, your twin there, but she can't help us out except this week, has already signed up with another company for the fifteenth of the month. Don't know what we are going to do—Miss Courtland is dreadfully ill—a poor chance, I am afraid, of her pulling around all right and getting out of here with us on Monday."

Thus he rattled on, half by design, I believe now, as I look back, to put me into the real work-a-day atmosphere of the theatrical world, and then left me, jumped over the orchestra rail onto the stage, now fully set for the rehearsal of the third act.

As its magic surrounded me I became conscious of the scene before me. It was a large room, and in the centre stood a handsomely carved table, strewn with books and papers, over which was suspended a hanging lamp that cast a dull, mellow light, giving the real coziness of home. There were three French windows in the setting, heavily curtained with a dark red silk material, which was drawn back, and outside the snow was falling. Upon the hearth, great oak logs blazed, and a sense of cheer pervaded the apartment, though a quiet lonesomeness seemed present, also. Suddenly one of the curtained doors was flung open and a young man of

perhaps twenty-five years entered the room. He was warmly wrapped in a long heavy ulster, and wore fur gloves. Silently he stood with his back against the door, his hands behind him holding the knob, his hat on, while his eyes wandered about the room as if searching for something. Finally he muttered in a low, sad tone:

"Home—home again!" and as the words died away in a suppressed sob, he left the door, took off his coat, hat, and gloves, walked to the fire to warm his fingers, then went over to the window and wearily muttered to himself, addressing the silence:

"How fast the snowflakes fall, the sleeping world will soon have a warm white coverlet. What a realm of shadows, and what a quiet peacefulness creeps over the face of nature in the twilight, how sweet the carol of the snowflakes floating dreamily about the wraithlike branches; the great world out there is nodding—nodding, and will soon sleep while I must be up and doing." He drew the curtains, returned to the fireplace, and stood upon the hearth rug contemplating the portrait of a man above him.

"Very good, Grey," interrupted Mr. Knowles. "Very good—you carry the funeral still in your eyes; but say, old man, take your time getting from the window to the fire, and turn left centre more, when you reach it, then the portrait will be directly in front of you, see? That's right—try it again." They went back to the entrance, and I, sitting there in the darkness alone, as the rehearsal progressed, was spellbound.

"And you are gone, father," the rich voice of

Charles Grey again echoed through the dim, shadowy place, "and I am alone, at your request, to lay the pages of the past wide before me, here in the room where you and I have spent so many cozy hours." Impulsively he left the mantel and crossed to a small desk, unlocked it, took out a bunch of sealed letters, and, seating himself at the table, adjusted the light, opened them, and read.

Spit!—Spat!—Siss!—the logs upon the hearth sent gleams of light aquiver through the loneliness of the room. As the youth read, the expression on his face changed from one of interest to that of horror, and finally he read aloud as if to wave the specters away with spoken words. As the rich voice went on and on, I, so unused to having the harp-strings of my soul played upon, sat wide-eyed, a pale-faced girl, in the great empty theatre, my hands held tight together, each finger interlaced, drinking in the tragedy before me, little knowing in what way the fingers of the world would clutch me and tighten about my frail body when held up to face that avalanche of might—the great unknown that lay beyond my village.

But the picture was still before me, and the rich voice read aloud from one of the letters on the table. It was from his dead father, and I was losing the point of the scene by my wandering thoughts.

"Son you have ever been to me, although the blood of another man flows in your veins. I tell you this now, because I could not rest in my grave if you were cheated out of the estate, and, knowing full well the character of my relations, I am forced to tell you a bitter—bitter truth. You are not my

son, Hulbert, although my dear wife was your mother."

The dark eyes of Charles Grey were lifted in the character of Hulbert, the son, and as he rested his cheek upon his hand after the disclosure of his birth—I traveled with him in the dark chaos of his despair. When the silence was again broken his eyes grew big in their trouble, and the voice spoke, a heavy sigh of relief warmed my heart——

"Oh, the mother-face," he murmured, "the mother-face of my babyhood, the sweet mouth with it's passionate curves, the hungry, soulful eyes, and that is all—only a flash—the thought-reality of my life has been the serious father with the sorrowing face whose lips mentioned her but once,—once in all my life."

In his excitement he got up and walked the floor, —anguish upon his brow; muttering, "The child of shame! The cruel, cruel truth of it—and I must face—it—alone. The offspring of lust! Ah, the pain—of—knowing—it freezes my blood. I cannot bear it,—no, I cannot bear it. Where are you, father, you that have always been everything to me?" He opened the window as if to breathe freer, and the answer seemed borne upon the night wind, moving beyond the stage window, "Dust to dust, Ashes to ashes."

CHAPTER VII.

A weakness seemed to creep about me as the solemn words echoed through the silent aisles, and it was a relief when the stage manager called out cheerily, "Hold on a minute, Grey!" and then hurriedly ran down the long black aisle and caught Mr. Alexander by the coat tails as he was disappearing through the centre door. A short conversation took place between them, and then he came to me once more and sat down.

"All right boys, fire ahead." It was almost a sacrilegious letting down from the serious pinnacle where my emotions had guided me, but the tenseness of the moment had been almost more than I could bear, and instinctively I knew that Wilbur Knowles had been watching me and had ordered that stop to bring me back to the consciousness that it was but the third act of a play after all. Poor little me, so unused to looking at life from an unreal standpoint.

The drama of the stricken youth continued, and Hulbert now slowly closed the windowed door, drew the silken curtains, and the silent snow-covered world was gone. He returned to the table as if fascinated by the letters lying there, and once more addressed them:

"You silent-tongued monks from the monastery of the past! You must speak, I suppose!"

My whole being was again in a thrill of emotion. Each letter stood before me as a living thing, and I rebelled in my heart, even as the son Hulbert, over their untimely birth.

"How I should like to strangle you," he went on, and then, reaching for the table, took up the letter and once more spoke to it.

"There you are, mysterious and dreadful beings, clothed in the raiment of truth, and I must let you speak and tell me of her,—the mother I have never known, yet ever cherished and guarded most sacredly within my heart."

Then as if waving away all weakness, he breathed a deep sigh, sat down by the table and resumed the interrupted reading of the letter.

"We lived happily together, Hulbert—your mother and I—I could never understand what was missing, and yet she, so young, so lovely, must have felt some lack, for she left me. For years I knew not of even her whereabouts. It is a very painful subject, Hulbert, and one I cannot write on at length, it suffices to tell you that after three years of silence she summoned me to her death bed. I found her—Oh! the pity of how I found her—alone—uncared for, starving,—dying with you at her breast. Can you wonder that I forgave my darling, forgave and forgot, aye, and even loved as I had ever loved? Who was I to stand in judgment? I loved, and, loving, saw only her sweet pleading face, her great tender eyes, mute with sorrow, the pathetic droop of her lips.

"Her story is briefly told: the man upon whom she lavished her love soon tired of his plaything—

she was honest, Hulbert, I believe it. Yes, I believe it, and she cared for the man. It was no play step for her—she was honest, and, being honest in her love, she has not sinned, but was sinned against. Deserted, forgotten in her great trial, she thought of me, of how I had loved her, and I have, Hulbert, with all my soul. Thinking of me and the death angel creeping nearer, brought courage, so she sent for me.

“Shall I ever forget that death chamber—the thin, scared woman face, the meager covering of that bed, and you, a little babe on her bosom?”

He stopped reading, his eyes filled with unshed tears, and a cry of anguish burst from his white lips: “Oh, my God! I cannot read more—it is too awful.”

Charles Grey stood before me in this moment at the full height of his power as an actor. His eyes, his mouth, even the fingers of his hands acted, and at once I knew what it meant to portray life, to play upon the heart strings of a careless public, waiting to criticise or admire. I knew what the Professor meant now, when he said I would bring the country lanes, the brown sparrows of the wood, and even the odor of rose-petals to the city folk in my voice. I knew now; but to return to Hulbert.

After the exclamation of horror the poor burden-stricken boy went over to the hearth, stirred up the dying embers as if to force a little ray of light into his over-troubled brain; then drawn again by a force he could not disobey, returned to the table and continued reading:

“She pointed to you, Hulbert, and whispered,

'take him to your heart,—let him atone—atone, teach him to love as I never could. He is mine, part of my bone and blood, and you loved me, let him atone, atone!' and she died. How glad I was that my hand had sought hers after her first words—for I feel she knew all was well. My poor darling! Forgive, Hulbert, as I have forgiven! You are a man and can."

At the word forgive he arose, anger upon his face, his fists clinched, nostrils dilated. "No, I can never forgive! Every man has a right to be well born, honestly born! The world has sorrows enough, a child should be free to look his fellows in the face and not sneak like a cur as if he were at fault!"

From behind the scenes chimes slowly tolled the vesper hour. As they echoed in the quiet room where the shadows were at play in every corner they acted as magic upon the excited youth. Slowly anger faded away, and he turned to the large arm-chair at the fireside, dropped into it as if mentally and physically exhausted. The long day of sadness, the dreary funeral rites, and now this sudden disclosure had been too much. The bell ceased tolling, and he whispered as if to the glowing embers:

"Her deathbed!—my mother's!—and he forgave! He, her wronged—husband!—and proved his love by carrying her son away in his bosom. The years have crept on, and he suffered silently and alone, hiding the truth and the misery. *The world must never know* that great man's sorrow," he cried aloud, rising. "Money could not compensate. My father," he whispered, addressing the portrait. "I will be silent—the hooded ghosts of the past shall

never strip her—my mother. Her shame must never be judged by a grinning public. Money is nothing to me—I am young, I can earn it!” and his face glowed with the passion of the thought of the new vista of life opening before him.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Now, Miss Grier,” whispered Mr. Knowles in my ear, gathering his legs together and straightening up as he bent toward me in the dim light. “It is time for your entrance, and we had better begin picking our way through these seats. “I couldn’t expect you to jump the orchestra rail so early in the game, could I?”

I was in another world, swept away in the passion of another’s grief. It was my first sight into the real drama, the reading at home had been vague, something outside of myself; but this called the very soul out of me, and my hands ached, each finger tired with the tenseness of the firm interlacing, and the voice beside me startled me. I was lost, lost in the world of sorrow, where souls struggled. A trembling seized me, and I followed Mr. Knowles like one in a dream.

We reached the stage after much winding in and out between the closed, plush chairs. The stage was almost dark, just the fire-glow. It was so arranged that my entrance might not be noticed, the audience must not perceive the new personality. I must come upon the scene gradually, not in the full glare of lights. By the fire-place was a large armchair and a sort of fernery divided it from the piano. I was

to sing hid away amid the green life and the glow of the fire-log.

We stood in the wings. I saw only Hulbert, the youth, facing his life; it grew easy to enter and be a part of that life. It was as my own, and when I read the lines after my cue had been given which ushered me before the footlights, "May I come in, Hulbert? I have tea and talk for you," I was even eager to enter and lend my aid to the fictitious comfort of the lonely youth.

It was real to me, all the sorrow, all the puzzling, and when his answer came to my question, "Just in a minute, *Helène*," I played the rôle as if it were my life.

For a second there was a pause as if he hesitated to let me know the secret, just divulged in the letters. But it was ended almost instantly, and "Come in, *Helène*," opened the door for me to enter. "I am lonesome for you, dear, come quickly!"

In my hands I carried a large tray with coffee cups on it. I placed it, at his words, on a low table on one side of the hearth and back of Hulbert. His eyes followed me as I adjusted each cup, then turning toward him impulsively and reddening with maiden blushes (they were real and not stage ones), I read my next lines.

"Why, Hulbert, how still you are and how gloomy everything is!" thus questioning, I crossed the room to turn on more light, but he stopped me by catching my dress.

"Come close, *Helène*, and tell me if you love me, tell me as you never told me before. Will you, dear, gratify me? Pretend I am ill or dying or any-

thing, but tell me once here by the firelight how much you love me."

"How strange you are, Hulbert," and I could feel a tender seriousness veil my face, a seriousness born of real feeling. I came to him as he begged me, his hand catching mine, drew me, a reluctant me, to his feet, and as I knelt there looking up into his earnest dark eyes, the world was forgotten and just we two lived.

The ferns back of us acted as a screen, the green life helped me in the part, and the lines came easier than before.

"I can't seem to find words for the asking, Hulbert."

He pressed me to him, close in his arms, and finally lifted my chin to a level with his, looked into my eyes and again pleaded, "Just this once, Hélène, tell me—tell me?"

"I'll tell it to you in a song, Hulbert, will that do just as well? It will be easier."

"Any way, my dearest, only tell me—tell me how much you love me."

I drew from his embrace slowly, his arms were unwilling to let me go. The piano was only a step away, and when I reached it I was still almost within touch of him.

The brusque voice of Wilbur Knowles entered my dream world just there.

"Now, Miss Grier," he cried from the wings, "keep your face front as much as possible; you are doing beautifully and following the cues bully."

I turned my attention to the piano again and my fingers pressed the keys with a certain bashfulness

at first, and then they chased each other nimbly back and forth; at length finding the part of melody, tried to tell of the wonders in the realms where they wandered. Then song burst from me, and I sang—sang as I never dreamed that I could. The words flew to my lips as my own and passed from me to that grief-stricken one. I laid bare my very soul. Each word was as a pearl for him, and I strung them together; jewels for the love that had never entered my life.

"Bravo—Bravo!" came from the dark in front. I was utterly unconscious of everything but the life I had entered. It was my life—my life and I lived it. Ah! how I lived it!

After I finished there was silence, and then I turned to him and read, "Don't you understand, Hulbert?"

There was no answer. I was supposed to throw myself upon his heart and say, "Don't you know how much I love you now?" and I said it with an abandonment that my mother would have marveled at, could she have seen.

"Yes, *Helène*," he answered, "I believe you love me—I do—but dear," he urged, sobs in his voice, "love is the house of joy and the house of my heart is sad, so how can I bid you enter? I don't know how to tell you the story, little girl," he faltered, as he pressed me closer.

"You must have coffee, Hulbert," I announced, and, rising, I busied myself about the tray, while he sat abstracted. "Here drink this, Hulbert, I beg," and I held out a dainty coffee cup from which the strong aroma of Mocha and Java was rising.

"Not yet, Helène—not yet—kiss me once more and then go over to the table and read the letter lying open there. When you have read it and know that I am a poor man, and worse than poor, my girl—but read, read."

I went to the table as he asked me. The letter was open as he said, and while he sat there sad-eyed and anxious, overcome by the sorrows of the day, I read and reread the closely written pages. At its close I tremblingly glanced his way, as the cue suggested, then on tip toe I reached his chair-back, and, leaning over, kissed his forehead, so drawn into deep creases.

"Now, I *can* tell you how much I love you, Hulbert, with all my soul, with all my being, and—and I understand. We will lock it away in our hearts, Hulbert. You and I, dear, will forget the sorrow and only remember where the picture is sweet to think on. I now know you to be the man of my dreams, through the dust and turmoil of life, through the sorrow, the anguish, and the joy I can lean upon you—we will forget and forgive together, Hulbert, you and I."

"Ah, my dearest!" he cried, and drew me around before him, "love is indeed a house of joy," and his dark eyes were filled with new hope and gladness.

Was it over, that first rehearsal, was it over? I hardly heard the congratulation upon every side. I longed to slip away unnoticed, for my heart was heaving and my blood leaping through each vein. I was glad when I heard a voice say:

"Good, good, Miss Grier, you will carry the part, all right."

Oh, it had been real to me, all the sorrow, the love, and I was tired. I put away the hand clasps nervously, a child taxed to the uttermost in a new world, and my lips feverishly murmured my adieus as I closed the stage door behind me and stepped out into the cool air.

"Yes, I'll be on time, Mr. Knowles, and no, I won't forget," and I was away from the babble of voices.

CHAPTER IX.

Absorbed I stumbled along the path to the outer entrance into the street trying to dissect the emotions stirring in my breast. Overhanging trees held out long wraith-like fingers above me almost shutting out the blue sky in their tender care to weave about me their protection. But I hurried along abstractedly. Finally leaving the block of elms with their brooding care, I reached the busy village thoroughfare. The tiny store windows were rich in colors; silks and laces flaunted their beauty temptingly. Graceful hats, with long white plumes resting on tall racks, were enough to interest any girl with a love for the beautiful. Unseeing I rushed on, for the excited tension of nerves within bore me along at a rushing pace. Suddenly I became conscious of hurrying feet behind me. A voice in a low persuasive call of my name brought me to a standstill just at the turn of the road that led off the avenue into a less pretentious street, at the end of which our cottage stood.

I knew deep in my heart whose voice it was. It was a psychological moment—the law of attraction was being upheld. I sent shy side glances over my shoulder, but girl-like shut my ears to the music of the voice that came to me on the air with indescribable sweetness.

"Miss Grier—Oh, Miss Grier!" again I let shy glances from wide innocent girl-eyes wander dreamily through the trees, as if there seeking the voice.

"Miss Grier, I say, Miss Grier!"

It was Charles Grey.

"My! but I am out of breath trying to reach you! You are certainly hard to catch, but you see I have accomplished the feat!" he exclaimed, as he reached my side.

I lessened my hurried pace out of compassion for his breathless condition.

"I just had to come and get it out of my system," he declared, adapting his gait to mine.

"Get what out of your system, Mr. Grey? I don't understand," and again my eyes went wandering. I was full of understanding, but mother Eve was strong within me, and I could not let the chance go by to tempt. I purposely rolled innocent eyes toward him and followed the eyes with a full front view of an innocent questioning face.

"I wanted to tell you how bully I thought you were in the part," his face was radiant with earnestness, "and to think you never did it before! I just had to follow, and tell you that you captivated us all. Why, the old man is all swelled up over his find, as he puts it."

"Oh, Mr. Grey, I am so glad you liked me!" I burst forth in true village fashion, quite forgetting the rôle of mother Eve. I was a girl now, a country girl at that. The momentary flaunting of superior grown up airs was gone. I blushed and stammered in true orthodox fashion and felt all

hands and arms, not forgetting the awkwardness of feet.

"And you, Mr. Grey, you were wonderful. You made me forget it was only a play, and put me in the part utterly. I shall always remember the feeling that thumped in my breast at your unhappiness. There were just two things in my heart when I stood in the doorway, a desire to comfort you and an utter obliviousness to all else but the still, fire-lit room, where the fiends of tragedy were loosed."

Overhead the birds twittered, the pebbles crunched beneath our feet, and the sun lay warm and radiant on the path ahead. There had been a rain the day before, and the air was full of a freshness that made us both draw deep into our beings, its fragrance.

"You like the country, Miss Grier?"

"I know nothing else but the quiet of long, elm-bordered lanes and the mystery of the rich meadow lands with the stretch of timber beyond. I have only heard from afar the murmur of even the village gossips, so to ourselves have we lived, mother and I. Then for variety, I have known the rough winter winds, the snowy tree-trunks, the gladness of living that comes from breasting the wind out in the open, where it whistles through ice-branches like a lost soul. I know nothing else but the country, Mr. Grey. I have read of crowded streets, the flare of many lights, the bustle and roar of tramping feet, the hurrying people in the city. The dear Professor opened my eyes into the world of song, but he also described to me the haunts of artists where they stretch their canvas,—where poets sing

their lays, where art struggles for recognition that it may wing above the sordid grind of the everyday. Then my mother, she once lived there, amid the whirl, so I know what lies beyond my village. You see, Mr. Grey, my mother came here just before I was born, and we have lived in our little nest of a home ever since."

Our eyes met as I pointed ahead where the fence of our garden commenced, and a sudden terror shot though my heart. "But why do I tell you all this! I don't know you, Mr. Grey—I don't know you."

"And why did I follow? It was no easy matter to follow, was it, Miss Grier?" Then we both burst out laughing, while our tongues rushed into safer channels.

At last the garden gate was reached, and in my imagination I felt the coziness within and the dainty tea table weighted down with tempting tea and biscuits, with jam, and gooseberry jam at that. The jam spoke strongest to me. As I held out my hand in farewell, a guilty feeling crept over me, at my unwillingness to share the goodies. I almost felt he knew my thought as he stood tall and dark beneath the warm gold of the sun. But I did so want to tell it all to my mother alone, this first flight of mine into the great world. I had tried my wings, they ached, and I wanted to creep beneath the soft mother-breast and be still. Did he understand all this—Charles Grey, as he clasped my hand? Did the desire so penetrate my being that it spoke to him through my eyes as I raised them to his? It must have been so, else the gentleness of his refusal to enter would not have thrilled me.

"One thing, Miss Grier, before I retrace my steps to the hotel. I have a surprise for you. I was born in this village, and my mother and father both died here, leaving me a tiny babe at the mercy of strangers. Will you let me come and see you tomorrow morning early before rehearsal, and will you help me locate the home where I was born? It is long closed up,—will you?"

I looked my answer, and the garden gate went click, just as my mother opened the door.

CHAPTER X.

The dark shadows of night at last, and the wind still amid the trees. Some days are different from others; they rise before us too beautiful for memory ever to forget, and my day from the rose-tinted morn to the eventide had been filled with beauty. It had teemed with excitement, and now as I lay in my bed I was tired, my limbs trembled, I was restless. I had experienced a mingling of emotions. The sea of countenances in the theatre still rose before me, reflecting a cold steely glare of indifference, then came the haughty face of pride waiting to hurl an unjust criticism upon me.

They drifted by as I lay in the dark thinking it all over, but I had won. I had journeyed over the path of criticism, past the myriad of unfriendly eyes, to the threshold of hearts. My voice had found their good will, for I had been recalled after my song, and I had sung an aria of the woods. A quaint, weird thing my mother had chanted to me since my babyhood. The words described moss-covered rocks and the little children ferns that stroked them so lovingly, the great trees that held out their arms with fatherly protection, and the quiver of tenderness upon the leaves in the enchanted lullaby-land.

Although my mother had been firm in her refusal

to come and see her birdling try its wings, I knew in some far corner she was sitting, and it was to her I sang the old melody, of the dear woods and the trees she had taught me to love. My heart, as I stood before the footlights, was dumb from excess of feeling, yet words were clamoring even as the rain clamors to feed the desire of the thirsty verdure. I was eager to pour out my joy into the dark that stretched wide before me.

Is it not a blessed relief to voice our desires, to set ringing through the hills our heart-longings, and find a satisfying answer, as comfort blossoming like the wild flowers at our feet? I had been full of desire when I stood before that great audience. Would it understand what I would lay at its feet? Each soul has its other self, and that other part, only, understands. Was there one within the sound of my voice that understood? It was my first step in the desert of life, alone. Would I wither and fade by the way and succumb to its scorching as I traveled on? Would I droop and pine under its disappointing sun-glare? Or would I have patience to know life in the human untruth, and, as my mother, still keep love alive in my heart?

All this came to me as I stood before that sea of faces and sought their hearts in song, and all this had followed me home even to my bedchamber. In our youth how freely we long to lay our treasures at the feet of the world. My youth had been spent near, near to the great heart of nature, and so I had much to give, for she had been lavish with me and her messages lay in my soul for the asking. There is a mute pathos about the aged who can-

not recall fields of daisies, the chasing of butterflies, playing hide and seek through tall field grasses, who cannot remember a tree-friend in a far-away youth-day. The Professor had told me the city was filled with such as these, and I longed to carry all this, even more to these hungry ones.

Mr. Knowles had said they might want me to go with the company on its departure Monday. "Would I go?" he had asked. I hardly knew. The little bedroom was full of tender recollections. It joined my mother's, and the door stood ajar between. Here I had looked up at the ceiling since my baby days, the ceiling that still held the color of the blue sky, that her thought had put there, with here and there a star. Ah, the nights, I had counted them as I tried to sleep at my mother's bidding, while she sat, busy sewing, ever sewing. The in and out of stitches,—the tired hands and the ever patient droop to the serious mouth,—how it all, as a vision was before me as my thought went back over the days that memory still cherished.

I could not tell her of this new offer, not to-night, so I had crept into bed to be alone, to think it out. Suddenly a light flared up in my mother's room, through the doorway it shone over my bed, and I knew sleep had not come to her, either. Something told me to slip in and talk it out with her, and I followed the impulse. There she was, bending over her work basket as she always did when she could not sleep at night. It seemed an outlet to restless nerves that tormented her. I stole up behind her, my bare feet making no noise upon the carpet, and kissed her hair.

"I can't sleep, either, Mother—let me get in your bed and watch you sew?"

"I don't know why I am so down-hearted, Elsa," she said. "It has been a long, long day, though a proud, happy one, and yet, dear, there is a pain that goes through my heart like a knife, and it hurts," she put her face in her hands and sobbed.

I was at her side in an instant, I knew the pain. It was hurting me, too, but not in the same way—youth was strong in me, and I longed to spread my wings, yet my girl heart was here in the cottage with her. Would I tell her now of the offer? We had shared every thought—yes, I would tell her, what in my heart I felt she had divined.

"I can go with them, mother, Monday; shall I?"

Bravely she lifted her tear-stained face and drew me into her arms.

"My little baby—you are all I have and all I can ever hope to have, of love—just you, with your sweet eyes—how can I give you up—send you out into the world? How will it treat you? It broke my heart, child, and, oh, it mustn't hurt my little one! You won't let it, will you, Elsa—you won't let it? I don't regret my life, child, whatever it has been—although it has only been half a life, dear—just you and a memory so precious to cherish, that as I look back I would live it all over again. But you, dear, my little girl—I have tried to prepare you when the time came for you to go, as I knew it would come, some day."

"And you have prepared me, mother," I sobbed from her shoulder, completely overcome at the sadness in her voice.

She drew from beneath her sewing in the work basket—the *picture*—and we bent over it together.

“You love him, your father, Elsa?”

“Yes, mother, with all my heart.”

“You must always love him, child,—always—he was true to all that is dear in man, to a woman. Promise you will always love him?” and her hand nervously held me so that my eyes were on a level with hers.

“I promise, mother, dear. Now, don’t be sad. I won’t go—I’ll tell Mr. Knowles to-morrow not to consider me.”

“But you must go, Elsa, you can’t bury yourself here in this little village as I have done. Lonely hearts out there in the world need your voice. Don’t something within tell you that, dear?”

“Yes, but how can I go and leave you here so alone?”

“I have the picture, Elsa, and you will come back.”

“Oh! I’ll earn money, mother, and you shall come to me in the city!” I cried all aglow. In a sudden the glamour of success reached me from the unknown.

“No, child, I can never go into the world of people again, I’ll stay here and be proud of my darling, and be happy in her happiness.”

I kissed her, but when my lips pressed her cheek I knew that where I was she must be,—some day. We wiped the tears away, and like two ghosts crept into bed, her bed, as I had done many times before when the counting of stars in the blue ceiling would not send me into slumberland.

CHAPTER XI.

My head ached the next morning, and I slept until the sun touched softly upon my face, quite an hour after my usual time of rising. A deep lethargy held me and my eyes refused to open, the lids lay upon my cheek like lead. It was only after much forcing that the tired, listless, unrefreshed body became conscious of the cool, perfume-laden air that was astir in the room. My thoughts came slowly, almost painfully—suddenly from my heart to my brain there rushed an all-absorbing consciousness of something, which caused me to jump out of bed. It was as if a tonic had been administered and had penetrated every part of me. Eyes opened, the heaviness fled, my cheeks glowed under the spell of the mystery that sent me bounding to my feet, and thoughts were busy as I hurried to dress in the chill of the room. As I pulled on soft stockings and bent over the buttons of my shoes, I could hear my mother's voice crooning a sad little lullaby as she busied herself in the kitchen, but I heard it as a sound from a far-away world—it meant nothing vital to my being. I did not respond to it as I did some mornings.

What was this marvelous thing, that was speaking to me and utterly obliterating all the dear ties of my girlhood? A week ago I had awakened

peacefully as a child, drawn back from the lullaby land, into the busy world, wholly absorbed in the sunbeams, that crept into my room to welcome me into a new glad day. Now life was holding a sweeter potion to my lips, and I drank, drank, and became unconscious of the dear old life. Surely fate was leading me into a wonderful world. I was in a mood of worship, an ecstasy of feeling was thrilling through my veins. What was it? It glowed all over me as I finished the adjusting of ribbons and laces, that I might open the door and go forth to meet the dream which had turned my night into day. The sadness that had closed my eyes in the wee small hours was forgotten, and the long night, during which I lay with my mother's hand in mine, was gone. Had my soul entered the outer circle containing that other one, who belonged to me, and was this the thrill that rises from the slight pressure of feet in the garden of love? The clock ticked cheerily from the book rack in the adjoining chamber, and before leaving the room after I had pinned the last rebellious lock into place, I ran in to see if it were really late, or if eagerness within my heart had deceived me.

Just as I entered there was a knock at the cottage door, and I stood silent, that I might hear who had found his way so early to our quiet abode. As I listened the blushes stole over my face, for it was the voice of Charles Grey who greeted my mother's good-morning. He had not forgotten. I laughed for joy and burst in upon them, ere my mother could tell of my laziness.

"Just a little sip of coffee, Mr. Grey, and I will

be ready. We are going to seek Mr. Grey's birth-place, mother," I explained, "and I promised to be ready early—but you see I overslept."

"Yesterday was long and trying," said my mother, as if in excuse of me.

I left them alone and disappeared into the kitchen where I knew the coffee was waiting me, on the back of the stove. I could not sit down, I was too eager to be off, so I just filled a cup and stood by the window, while I drank it.

Oh! the deep, deep wonder of woodland groves, the strength to be found in the friendship of the pine trees. I was alive to it all as I tripped gayly along beside the serious man, who a mysterious something within my heart told me would have a voice in the shaping of my future. I had a child-like confidence in the good of everything, the clover blossoms and the hedges along the old lanes, the dear, free-hearted flowers sharing their blossoms so liberally by the way-side, lay on my heart as honey. I lifted joyous, happy eyes to the dark ones of Charles Grey, and they mutely asked if he understood the emotions, that were surging through me. We walked along in silence for some time, till at last the gladness bubbled forth in speech.

"How wonderful it all is, Mr. Grey. We are told about fairy-land from our baby days, but it cannot be more magical than a morning in the country, with the air quite still and the clear blue shadow of the sun-tinged sky above."

He laughed a glad, appreciative laugh, he saw even as I, and my heart leaped to him and my hand seemed drawn to touch even the hem of his coat.

I loved life as I had never loved it before, because it had brought me into near contact with him.

"How far is it to Summit Hill?" he asked.

"About a ten-minute walk," I answered. "I always walked it in that time when I went to the Professor's."

At the mention of the Professor I stopped still in the road and faced him, excitement written all over my face.

"Is your home a brick house, and was it *let* this summer to a Professor Camden from the city?"

"I hardly know the details," he answered, "but it seems to me it was rented to somebody. I haven't seen the man that has charge of it for years. I have never felt more than a halfway yearning to see the place, I hardly liked the thought of it. Such fancies will take hold of a fellow, you know, when both father and mother are gone. A sort of dislike settled over me as though the old house was responsible, for my having never known the sweetness of a real home."

"It is a dear place to me," I cried, "if it is the house where the Professor lived. How splendid he was and how often have I listened while he told me of the studio life in New York till something within me became unmanageable, something quite different from my ordinary self. I longed to be a part of the city life;—one of the busy hurrying throng. But we must hasten, don't you think, Mr. Grey, or be late at rehearsal. I am afraid they would not excuse me as they would you."

"Just nine-thirty," he replied, taking a side glance

at his watch, so we quickened our steps and ahead of us rose Summit Hill.

"Is that it?" I cried as the dear brick house was gradually outlined against the sky. "Oh, I hope it is," and then blushed at my impulsive words, they *might* mean so much.

Why should I care to discover that the Professor's last home was the home of this stranger, whom I had never heard of until a few days ago. Why? But it was so, and as we opened the creaking rust-hinged gate and picked our way through the tall weed-grown path, the blood went leaping through my veins.

Unlocking the door, we entered the darkness of the closely boarded rooms. Everything was as mother and I had left it. We lighted a candle, half burned away, and I guided him through the apartments. I glanced up at him now and then, as I described the summer days spent there. A deep softness lay in his eyes as I chattered on.

A strange happiness possessed me as I walked beside my almost silent companion through the deserted place.

At last we reached the large sitting-room that the Professor had loved so well and where I found the pathway that led me into the realm of melody.

"It is all so new and strange to me, Miss Grier," he ventured, as we faced the dingy blackness of the fireplace and the charred half-burned log silent there; his tone took on a sad regretfulness as he went on, "I was but a babe when I was turned over to strangers, but they gave me the letters that had passed between my parents at different times,

and in that way a little of the tenderness which linked their hearts together came to me and awakened in my boy breast the resolution to some day visit the home where I was born. But I always dreaded the coming and the facing of the past. You make the visit more real to me, Miss Grier. It would have all been so vague—the dull bricks and the stiff old furniture would have meant nothing, without your guiding hand. How can I thank you for so endearing to me the home that has never been a home? You are a queen—you waved your wand, and by its magic, unknown feelings in my heart have sprung into being; they might have lain dormant forever if you, in your sweet generosity had not bade them awaken. Now, words written on yellow paper are as living beings. I can see that mother, whose love flowed as a river through every line of closely written sentences, as I never saw her before. The dear home life, Miss Grier, that once permeated these rooms is wafted back to me from the long ago. I shall come again many times.”

His eyes held a far-away expression, and obeying an impulse that was a part of me, having many times so led my dear one, I took his hand and drew him from the house. There was no surprise in his eyes at my boldness;—it was as if my hand had always sought his. I turned the key in the lock, and we hurried along to rehearsal. The brisk, cool air brought the cheer back into his eyes, though it never was quite the same between us. The old house with its memories had held out empty arms and called to us both to fill them.

CHAPTER XII.

In our modest little home everything was astir for the next two or three days. I had told Mr. Alexander that I would go with him. Miss Courtland was still very ill, her life was even in danger. They were all very kind to me, and Mr. Knowles had arranged it so that I could wait and join them in New York three days after their departure, as their time at The Bijou did not begin until the Monday night following.

Our cottage was always kept scrupulously clean, but during these last days disorder reigned, and when Mrs. Aiken dropped in one morning dismay was written on our faces, for there was a wilderness of skirts and petticoats about, undergoing the looking over for rents, while dresses hung upon chairs waiting inspection. How simple they looked in this new reflection of the great city. My mother was quite in a daze how to change the utter simplicity of their cut and outline, so as not to draw unfriendly glances upon me.

In the midst of our trouble stood Mrs. Aiken, —the same tall, well-built woman with the glossy black hair drawn back from her high forehead. The primness of outline was there, too; but the restlessness of the eyes was gone and a light shone in them, a tenderness that caused me to put my

hand in hers and lead her near the fire, to the chair, that stood empty there.

"You find us in confusion, Mrs. Aiken," said my mother, "but when a young girl leaves the home nest for the first time, you know what it means, I am sure."

The fire blazed cheerily and sent strange shadows into the corners of the room. Lines of transfiguring light lay on the black hair of the woman sitting in the fire-glow, and sent a deeper shadow over the eyes. They glowed with strange tenderness, as they sought my mother's, mutely asking for the privilege of closer converse.

"I know your heart is sad, my dear lady," she said, and lingered over the words lovingly as if unaccustomed to speak, with the sweet nearness of love in the accent. They were almost strange words, one could feel, seldom uttered and the question came slowly, with the hesitancy of strangeness upon it.

A smile was in my mother's eyes, and, though they were sad, I knew by a firm tightness about her mouth, that she meant the last days should be joyous ones for me, at any cost to herself. I must carry strength in my heart, into my new life, and she knew that happiness was strength.

"I know the ache in your heart, Mrs. Grier," went on our caller, "the hungry lonely ache that will grow hungrier, as the days pass into weeks and then into months and years."

Tears were rushing to my eyes, and my mother hastened to stir up the logs upon the hearth to dispel the gloom that had entered with her words.

She held a handkerchief to her eyes as she continued in the same tender, low, sorrowful tone of voice, "Thank you for listening, Madam, and now I will be myself—the storm is over. We will command the ocean waves of emotion to be still." With a quick decisive movement of her head, as if ashamed of the momentary weakness, she went on, "Her clothes, Mrs. Grier, has she clothes?"

The question came so abruptly out of the midst of sadness that it startled us, and a deep red color rushed to my mother's face.

"Of course, my dear lady, I know your pride, but forget it in the welfare of your daughter. I had a daughter once, but she died on the eve of her eighteenth birthday, and what a birthday it was to have been. I wasn't a stiff-necked, stern old woman then, but full of the mother-love, and young,—young and gay,—yes, gay, madam. She died, and I died, too, the real woman in me, and only the hard crust was left. We were rich, husband and I, and my dear little girl had many beautiful dresses. Will you let your Elsa take them with her into the world that she is about to enter? I feel as if my dear one would be glad, and, oh! it would mean so much to me—and,—I am lonely."

My mother leaned nearer and laid her hand gently upon the great lady's knee, and there was silence between us. My heart ached for the stern woman who had laid bare the hidden grief of her being, but there was nothing I could say. I could only stand aside and wait until her white face grew less weary, and the balm of comfort had come from

the unseen ministering ones. I could not break in upon the holy spell that the opened grave of her sorrow had cast through the room. My mother's eyes sought strength in the reddening flame of the log upon the hearth. From another room came the regular ticking of the clock, and now and then the creak of a board broke the silence. I studied the pattern in the carpet and outlined it with the toe of my shoe. My eyes would timidly search the distressed face, half hidden behind a handkerchief, held there by nerve-twitching fingers. At last it became unbearable. This was real grief and it hurt, as it always had hurt, when I innocently touched the cords of my mother's anguish. I stole silently out of the room into the kitchen.

"Tea! that is the thing!" I would make tea, and it must dispel the gloom.

I returned as soon as fingers could gather cups and saucers and the fire set the water boiling. They were quietly talking when I reappeared, and I knew my mother had granted her prayer. It was so like her, my mother, at the call of another's woe she could even forget her pride.

"The faded muslins can be put away now, Elsa," she said, "and won't you be fine, my girl? I know the wearing of the dear dresses taken from the shrine that memory has kept sweet will give you inspiration, and you will sing even better, for the wearing of them. Another's hopes and joys have gone into them."

In that radiant instant I knew she spoke the truth. The golden minutes slipped by as we drank

our tea. When Mrs. Aiken retied her bonnet strings and started home I went with her, and there was the light of happiness in her eyes. It seemed as if the crust of hardness had melted away and the gold of her nature shone clear and beautiful. Thought and action were never far apart from her, and so she had insisted upon my accompanying her home to bring the bundle back immediately that my mother might make necessary changes.

"It was your singing, child,—your tones haunted me all that night after hearing them, and when I slept toward morning a voice out of the dark seemed to speak to me. I was afraid at first, then I remembered I was in my daughter's bed-chamber, drawn to sleep there, that night, by some mysterious influence. Women have strange attachments for places, especially those endeared to them by love—a carpet often pressed by loved feet, how we care for and protect it, child,—a book with the leaves turned down by fingers now still and cold. So I slept in the bed where my dear one's girlish fancies had roamed free. Miss Elsa, she spoke to me that night and sent me to you."

There was a motherliness in her tone, and it touched me deeply.

"Until to-morrow," she called as I left her, driving back in an old phaeton, because of the bigness of the bundle. "I shall want to see you in them, my dear," and she waved me good-bye.

Youth and happiness were mine and a singing heart, and so necessarily all the worries must steal away. The dear God knew my need, and lo! in the passing of an hour he had clothed me, even as

the sparrows. The autumn mists were rising, and in my heart there grew a wonderful purpose, as I was driven along through the dimly lighted streets of the village.

CHAPTER XIII.

I was as one possessed, as I held up dress after dress before my mother. We had finished our simple evening meal and had carried our dessert into the sitting-room to enjoy before the blazing logs. The flavor of cherry tart vanished for me, as I caught sight of the long and heavy-looking bundle resting on a chair by the door. The tart was not to be endured, the big bundle fascinated, so string was recklessly cut and the wrapper torn away.

"Mother!" I fairly shrieked; "look, look at this blue one."

It was the last in the pile of neatly folded gowns, and it was blue, the color I loved. I could not resist trying it on, and in the enthusiasm of youth I slipped into my bedroom, spreading the delicate blue silk upon a chair, while I hurriedly pulled buttons and ribbons apart, let my brown cashmere slip to the floor, and, stepping out of it, I reached for the dainty soft silk lovingly. Then I realized my hair was all askew and something within would not let me don the pretty garment in so untidy a condition. I drew my fingers back and set them to pulling out the hair pins.

What a long time I spent in front of the tiny

oval mirror. I seemed to be looking into the eyes of a stranger, and I began to study each feature with deep interest. How white the face in the glass looked, how dark the eyes, yet the lips were full and red. How unlike my mother was the countenance reflected. Her skin was warm and rosy and her figure all grace and curves, while the face staring at me in the oval glass was thin, perhaps the curves and grace would come later, as angles often are the fault of youth. There was the depth of many worlds in the eyes, though, that gazed so steadily at me, and I knew what lay slumbering there. It was a soul straining to be free to take its place in the world of those that have come through desperate grief into the realm of the beautiful, where love is the password. I had chosen my task in life, and I would reach the goal, led on by the sunbeams, the summer rain, moonlight, and the sound of many waters. 'Twas a glimpse into the spirit world that lay in the eyes reflected in the glass. All the sorrow of life lay trembling in their depths, and all the courage of a royal faith to endure, shone forth clear and beautiful.

I shook myself free from the giant forces quivering through me, gently stroking my face as if to claim it as my own once more and withdrew from the spell of things that come when we look too far into realms of the infinite. With sudden eagerness I caught up the dress, and, with a swish of silk, it was over my head. The soft loveliness clung to my figure, and I took a timid step, letting it trail gently behind. My face was aglow with modest delight, and I blushed, as, glancing up, I caught

my reflection in the mirror. It was becoming, and my eyes filled with wonder. I smiled, for the dress was mine, and I was beautiful in it.

How shyly I tiptoed to the door, thinking to enter and surprise my mother with my grandeur. She was still sitting by the fire-glow, where I had left her finishing the tart. The room was wrapped in an air of coziness, and the plate with the half-eaten sweet rested on her lap, while two fingers lay carelessly near where they had relaxed from keeping in safe position the delicate china. She wore a plain, dull blue dress, without a collar, made short in the sleeves, and her hair was piled up high on her head, like a huge coronet of gold. There was a far-away look in her eyes, as if she were held in a subtle spell that she could not withstand, and she stared intently into the glowing embers.

Softly I crossed the room, fearful that she might feel my presence and too soon be recalled to her surroundings. Taking a quick step forward, I reached out my hands and one—two—three, they were over her dream-filled eyes.

“Dearie, is that you? How you startled me.”

“Prepare yourself, mother, dear, you are to behold your daughter arrayed in all her glory, even as the Queen of Sheba—are you ready?” and a happy little laugh unclasped my fingers. I came round in front of her and courtesied.

“Do I please you, mother?”

“How beautiful you are, Elsa, but you seem to have grown,” she said, rising and putting the dish on the table, then walking to the other end of the

room, she looked me all over, her eyes filled with love. "I had no idea you were so beautiful," she repeated.

"I'm not, mother, it's only the dress. You know my nose is altogether too long and my chin too short and——"

"Hush, Elsa, don't go on like that—you are dark like your father, you have his skin, and there is a look of me about your eyes—you are quite like a fairy standing there by the hearth, a vision of loveliness that has floated into the room, in orthodox fairy style."

"I wish I could creep into hearts like that," I said, letting the serious mood have sway for a moment. "How did so much love get into my being, mother?" I asked, going over and putting my hands on her shoulder.

"Love is your heritage, Elsa, just love, perfect and pure. But come, dearie, let me look at you critically and see what changes must be made, now that you have the dress on. I knew this one would catch your attention because it was blue. It has very good style, the old sleeves come back after ten years of banishment. It will have to be shortened, and that is about all."

"Isn't social position a strange thing, mother?" I said, pulling at her hair as she knelt on the floor to pin up the skirt.

"How does it look to you, Elsa, dear?"

"I hardly know, but why should Mrs. Aiken live in all the comfort she does while you sew and work so hard?"

"Things are not adjusted so unevenly, Elsa, as

you think. I have known a love that stretches over all my life, and I have you, while perhaps Mrs. Aiken has never known the deep thrill that comes from the touch of love on the soul, who knows? And until we know, dear, until the mist is cleared away, who can say that things are unevenly measured out in this world.

"I hope I won't become vain," I said, as I slipped out of the blue dress, my thought ever changing.

"What are you thinking of, mother?" I added, as I caught her eyes upon me and stepped away from the fluffiness circling me.

"Of a blue dress that I owned once, child, it floated around me like a soft gauzy cloud, and I remember your father liked me in it better than any dress I had. I used to put it on always, when it was cloudy and rainy; it seemed to bring heaven right in through the rain-spattered window pane, my dear one, would say it made my eyes seem bluer than ever, and he could read the truth of love in them more easily."

I stroked the flushed face softly, sitting down on the floor beside her in childish fashion. What children we were and how we did love to talk and theorize about things. We had always lived in this unconventional way—she, sometimes talking quite beyond my years, but I caught much of life in her words. The darkness had gradually parted before my vision, and the daylight of understanding swept over me as the days of my youth lengthened. As I stood now upon the threshold of womanhood the path of my life stretched before me, illuminated with a light that was alive as with a dear presence,

which I could crush close against my heart. Would I ever forget these last days in our nest of a home? No—no—they would follow me everywhere, I knew that, and I laughed at our position on the floor—laughed for gladness that these last days should be so full of sweetness and tender talks.

CHAPTER XIV.

The desolation that swept over me as I lifted my foot to the step of the car, that was to bear me away into the great unknown lying beyond the village, seemed at that moment unendurable, and yet the words, "Oh! I am so happy!" kept singing themselves through my heart, almost proclaiming that desolation, false,—God knows it was not—we are so contradictory in our natures—we poor struggling ones. I was happy, and I was not happy, the green trees and the exquisite day, the unknown drawing me on and on, did fierce battle with the emotions struggling in my breast. Another day and I would be alone upon the highway of life, with no prospect of seeing my dear one,—the mother whose love had so sheltered and protected me. But that was to-morrow and I must live the to-day—and what was my to-day? My mind flew back to the last hour together—the tender lingering of her arm about me and the gentleness of her fingers as they caressed my face, like the action of one blind who would impress more closely the dear outline of loved features. Was it over, the day of my youth, so happily spent in the cottage home, hid away in a village? I impulsively gathered those white fingers in my hand and pressed them to my lips——

"Don't, mother—don't trace the loneliness over my face, help me or I just cannot go."

She was strong of will, my mother, and my appeal was answered—those last few minutes together before I entered the bus—that was to take me to the station, in those last few minutes she bravely lifted the lonely veil that had almost mantled me and my vision cleared. We said our good-bye, there on the tiny porch. At the very end, as she held me at arm's length and looked at me proudly I grew pale, it was torture, this first parting with her, and I was frightened at what might lie beyond the enfolding of her arms.

"Elsa, dear," she whispered, "there is nothing to fear—out there—he is in the world of people—your father—nothing will harm you there, in his world."

"But, mother," I cried, "I only want you."

Yet her words comforted, and, as our eyes met for the last time, a deep, deep richness of love lay in their depths; a love that I knew could surmount all distance, that would be near me at every turn of the road,—*out there*. The clumsy bus backed up to the walk and I stumbled in, carrying with me that last wonderful look in her eyes. There was a hush over everything, only the loud call of the driver to his horses broke the quiet. It sounded shrill, harsh, and cruel, breaking the perfect harmony, into which we had been lifted.

"Get up," he lazily called to the scrambling beasts, as they tugged at the huge wheels. Slam went the door, the trees intervened between us, then

the cottage and my mother were lost to view by a quick turn of the road.

Mrs. Aiken was at the station, and as I put my foot on the step of the train she whispered, "Don't worry, child, about your mother—we'll look after her."

There was only time to thank her with my eyes, for the engine was snorting restlessly and the steam puffed irregularly, rising to the sky in lacy waves. I had not wished my mother's farewell in the unfamiliar waiting-room, but there was a magic current of love between us, and her look seemed upon me as I felt the gradual moving of wheels carrying me along. A strange peace settled over me while I buried my face in the cool, sweet blossoms Mrs. Aiken had pushed into my hands at the moment the porter hurried me aboard. It was a peace that would never leave me, but hover over and under and about me, exquisite as the echo of a song that comes to one from some memory shrine in the heart.

My first journey in a train!—surely I was a country lass, and a sudden shyness seized me. Would others know that I had never before felt the quivering motion of the train, never known what it meant to fly through meadow land, past the mighty prairies or span a slow running river, entangled mid the bushes and thick underbrush of some forest? My satchel lay at my feet with bulging sides, and the flowers were tightly clasped in my hands. How rich I felt with the sleek brown satchel, and then there was my trunk so closely packed with every possible dainty mystery of a

girl's wardrobe. The dresses folded so tenderly away, and fitted into the narrow trays so carefully. I could see the shimmering laces and delicate colors flit by me, mingling strangely with the autumn tints outside the car window.

Gradually I was at ease in my new surroundings. Too much of my mother's heart was in the great world, not to have accustomed me to the knowledge of life there. We had walked the streets of New York many times in a cozy evening by the fire, and she, ever eloquent with word-pictures, had made it all very real. Soon I would know—how real. The car I was in was nearly empty, for several hours, then gradually each seat was filled. My thoughts were too busy to wander idly along the aisle of the car, in search of sympathy. Many voices spoke to me, and the breaking of home ties made me shun companionship and seek through the narrow window, to keep in view the trees and sky that were the same even as the distance from home lengthened. Presently I would be far beyond the dear farm land, the peaceful scenery, and the glorious breath of the out door of the country would be lost amid the tall buildings of a city.

The hours of the afternoon crept away, and as we were carried past town and village nestling far back in hill or forest, we gradually came nearer and nearer to the river I had loved and longed to see—the Hudson. At last we reached its banks—and how splendid it was, illuminated by the setting sun, stretching its golden light across the rolling blue of the waves that had the sheen of satin upon them.

In my enthusiasm I raised the window, and, leaning in my usual way on my elbows, I drank in all the glorious dying sunlight. The air was full of dreams, and I could see love upon the waters as we skirted the river's edge.

How it appealed to me—the gentle ebb and flow of that fascinating river—not as the ocean would fascinate, I felt sure of that. I longed to see the ocean with a passionate longing I could not explain. I wanted to plunge my whole body into its great arms and feel its waves engulf me; the ocean was a part of my being, but there was peace along the river bank. Here was a setting for a love dream, with no undercurrent of suffering.

At once the face of Charles Grey rose before me, and my cheeks flamed with a dull red color spreading quickly to my temples. The cool river zephyrs played over my face, and with my chin in my two hands I dreamed on. He was to meet me when the train pulled into New York. A sudden fear seized me. If he shouldn't come, or if—that "if," quite unnerved me, and I let the window down and worked myself into a nervous fretfulness that brought a dull ache to my head.

It was just an intermittent pain at first, now and then gripping me, but it grew steadily worse as we whirled along. The sun was melting away in the blue clouds, and I fought bravely with the treacherous pains that darted through my temples. I had kept myself up to an unusually high tension until now, but nerves would stand no more and had rebelled. At last I must yield—let them relax

and find rest. I loosened the collar of my dress, took off my hat, closed my eyes, shut myself away in the silence and slept,—slept until there was nothing to be seen but darkness from the window. The porter passed as I opened my eyes, and I asked him how much longer it was.

“Just an hour, miss.”

How quickly the time had flown by, and how near I had been, after all, to the city life the Professor had loved. I smoothed back stray locks, and an instantaneous desire to look well was upon me as I followed a lady and her baby to the dressing room with my satchel in my hand. She was a tired-looking woman, frail and dispirited, but the baby was round-cheeked and big-eyed, with wonderful yellow curls. I held out my arms to him impulsively, as she was trying to wash his face.

“Let me hold him while you do it,” I said.

“Thank you, miss, I want him all clean and nice—to please his father. He hasn’t seen him, miss, since he was a tiny baby in long clothes. We lost what little money we had, and I had to stay back there on the ranch with my folks, while he went on ahead, to make a home for us. It’s been a long wait, but it’s over now, and O, miss, do you think he looks fine? I made the coat myself all by hand,” and she held it out for my inspection. It was a rough goods, but each stitch had been put in carefully, and it hung in warm folds around the struggling baby in my arms.

“And his hair, miss—that is the worst. My man don’t like curls on a boy, and it will curl, but I just could not cut them off, could you?”

The soft little ringlets of gold touched my face, and I knew I could not have cut them, either. I told her so, and she quickly twisted them around her finger while I held him, as if my word about them was a sufficient excuse for their existence.

"We must soon be there now, and O, I thank you, miss. I never could have gotten us both ready if you hadn't helped, and I want to look nice, too—for him," and her eyes were luminous as she left me alone to get myself in order.

My fingers were awkward with the bumping and jarring of the train, and I had just pinned on my hat when I felt the slowing up of the wheels and the gradual diminishing of speed. Then came a jolt, a sudden stop, and we were in the gateway of the great city. The porter had taken my bag and forged ahead, and I followed in line with the rest. The tired mother, with the baby, was just in front of me, and I was glad of that, because I wanted a glimpse of the man who had gone before to make a home. There he was—her man—both arms outstretched as she stood on the lower step of the car with the baby in her arms. He had a round, kind face like the baby's, and the little woman was quite lost in his ample embrace. He could care for her, he was so big and strong, and I was glad.

I had been so absorbed in this couple, meeting after many days, that I had forgotten I was alone in New York and no one was there to greet me. I took the satchel from the porter and bravely held the tears back, hardly knowing who it was I ex-

pected to meet me. I had just taken a firm hold of my satchel and was mingling in the crowd when a hand touched mine on the handle. I knew as I raised my eyes that I, too, had found protection in the strong hand clasp of Charles Grey.

CHAPTER XV.

Most of the company had sought rooms in a quiet hotel in Forty-second Street between Broadway and Fifth Avenue, and it had been agreed between my mother and Mr. Alexander that I should come direct to him there, that I might have the companionship of his wife. My mother liked the idea, and so it was here that Charles Grey brought me. He was staying at the bachelor quarters of a friend, and as we turned the corner off Fifth Avenue into the less pretentious side street, he pointed ahead to a tall brown brick building several yards away. It was at an angle from my destination, and he minutely described the location of certain front windows that were his, whence he could see other windows in the hotel where I was to stay. After earnestly describing locations he looked at me, and, strangely enough, I was impelled to glance at him at the same moment. As our eyes met, they said what lips would not have dared to utter—so bold are eyes. They reveal the hidden treasures of our hearts and open the door for kindred ones to enter into the holy of holies, where even angels hesitate to tread. My heart warmed to him as we parted at the entrance to the hotel where he relinquished my satchel to a waiting porter.

"Have you had supper?" he asked, as he held my hand. "Have a bite with me," he urged impulsively, tightening his fingers as they clasped mine.

"I can get a taste of something here, can't I?"

"Yes," he answered, "but don't you want to share mine with me?"

"Not to-night, I am tired and my head is in a whirl. Thank you so much, Mr. Grey, for meeting me. I should have been trampled under foot without you."

As I finished speaking the swinging door opened and the round cheery face of Mr. Alexander faced me.

"Well, my dear child, you've come. Break away, Grey, and I'll take charge of our traveler now."

We went to the desk, and a tall, consumptive-looking man handed a boy a key, and, following him, I entered the elevator.

"I won't go up, Miss Elsa, but I'll send my wife in to see that you are comfortable."

Soon I was stowed away in a little corner room and the door was closed upon the bell boy, who had settled my satchel on the table in a very business-like manner, and then drawled out:

"Want ice water, miss?"

A terrible loneliness enshrouded me. It was seven o'clock in the evening, and from the window a million toy lights gleamed from tall spires. They looked almost like stars, that had dropped from heaven to the buildings below. What a world of brick and stone. No nature here, only the sky above. But the dear sky hovered as a canopy at

least, and if there were not trees to wave and beckon me as I eagerly searched the out doors from my window, I could still feel the soft breezes on my cheek though they were not laden with the sweet fragrance of mingling blossoms.

The street was miles below, and how tiny seemed the moving figures of men and women. There was a difference in the look of everything here. The little square window pane at home held no such wonders as these. There the crickets would be chirping, now and then a farm wagon would hurry past, the dust would fly and cloud the soft air for a moment, but here, there were faces passing to and fro like swarms of bees. An uneasiness was beginning to take hold of me, and I shifted from one foot to the other, my fingers began beating a tattoo on the window pane.

But I could not stir, the greatest of all things was happening. I was getting my first glimpse of New York and the enthusiasm of the artist awoke in my heart. I could always see pictures in everything, and I caught my breath at the bigness of the scene that was spread before me. 'Twas a live canvas and when was I to be painted in,—was I to be one of the struggling ones? Would I pose as Tragedy and lay my heart tortured and scarred before the God that held life and love in the hollow of his hand?

Of a sudden my heart yearned for the sunny room of our cottage and the low voice of my mother. As my heart yearned, tears blotted out the tall buildings, and there was a blur over everything. I was beginning to wish I had let Charles

Grey stay, and, following the thought, my eyes sought the brown brick where his window opened. Did life look to him from the square pane as it did to me? Was he wondering even as I, where he would be in the picture? A gentle knock sounded at the door, and I turned from the window quickly, glad to get away from the gloomy thoughts that were beginning to rush in upon me. A turn of the knob revealed the kindly face of Mrs. Alexander.

"My poor child, you are all in the dark, and that is so dreary."

"Oh, I don't mind it,—I was so lost in the view outside. It is all wonderful and new to me. But I believe it is time for the lights now. I was beginning to see home, out there in the dark," I answered. "Do you know where the light is, Mrs. Alexander?" I asked, "I didn't notice when I came in, and it is quite dark now."

She found the button and pressed it, and in a moment we were flooded in a glare of brilliancy.

"You have never been in a city before, my dear?"

"No," I answered, "and I am lonely now for the first time, a sort of terror at the bigness out there was about to engulf me when your knock recalled me. Sit down, won't you?" I urged. We were still both standing by the door.

"Take off your things and I will."

"Why, I had forgotten all about my hat and jacket—yes, and gloves, too—but sit down, and I'll remember that I am at home here now, not just calling," and I laughed at my absent-mindedness.

"Just think, I had even forgotten the hat pin

that is still pulling at some stray hairs, as it has been since leaving the train.

"Won't you call me Elsa?" I begged, a sudden wave of friendliness toward her kindly face possessing me, "then I'll feel less alone, I know."

"Elsa!—'tis a beautiful name and won't be hard to say. Are you going to use it on the stage?"

"Oh, yes," I said as I pulled out the pin that had entangled itself so awkwardly in my hair. "It's off now, and I feel more at home already— isn't it a funny little hat?" I cried, holding it up.

"Such an odd turn to the rim, but quite the style in the country and guaranteed to be the proper shape and hue," and again I laughed.

"Have you had anything to eat, that's the question now, I think. But I won't ask, I'll just order something while you are getting acclimated,—that's a good word to express it,—hey, my dear?" and she bustled about in a way that made me feel I had known her always.

The room was plain, painfully unattractive after the delicate furnishing of my bed-chamber at home, but I rather liked the round dark mission table and the little desk by the window. I silently promised myself to write a long, long letter home before I slept.

A narrow, white iron bed stood in the corner, a rocker and two other chairs and a bureau completed the furnishing of the room. I shyly watched Mrs. Alexander in the glass of the dresser as I smoothed back my hair. She was a little woman with a look of home about her that I liked, and I was glad she would call me Elsa. We chatted merrily together

while I nibbled at chops and biscuits and a generous piece of pie, and when the last mouthful had disappeared she rose to depart.

"I really must go, Miss Elsa," she said. "I have a hungry man in there, a man with an appetite, and you know, and if you don't, heed what I say—look after his appetite when *he* appears, my dear."

Why should I blush? But I did, and I caught the faintest sign of a merry twinkle in her eye as she turned toward the door.

"Now put on a loose wrapper, child, and make yourself comfortable if you are going to write, as I know you will. It isn't so far back that I have forgotten my first night away from my home folks, and I remember I sat up most of the night writing, but you mustn't do that. We have rooms close to you, right next door, and if you get frightened just rap on the wall and I'll come right in."

I thanked her and nodded my good night. I was glad to be alone again and yet grateful that she had come to help me live that first awful lonely moment, which had swept over me at the sight of the many high buildings and the pavement so far below my window. The door had hardly closed when the porter brought my trunk. It was like the coming of a friend, that square brown trunk. As I turned the key in the door I shut the world out, and myself in, to think about everything all over again, and I was glad to be shut in alone.

I opened the trunk eagerly and laid my night apparel ready on the bed, and, unbuttoning my dress, slipped into a wrapper, then settled myself at the little desk to tell it all to *her*, back there in the

quiet village. I knew she was doing the same thing, and that our messages would pass each other.

Was she sewing as she had been that other restless night? And would she seek the picture now, as then? An understanding of her loneliness came as I waited, pen in hand, eyes following the pattern on the lace curtains. But her memories would be there and I would write often, I knew that.

"Mother," I whispered, "I am with you in thought, and I want you to know it."

I closed my eyes, and there in the silence I felt she heard and was content. It had not been a mistake, my coming. I was not drifting aimlessly about, but watched over by a love that had never failed me and never would, as I would never fail it. I had to cuddle very far under the covers that first night, for I felt exceedingly small in the corner room, so far above the dear earth below; but I was tired and soon slept in spite of the strangeness of everything—slept and found my mother's arms in the lullaby-land where the fairies that put us to sleep carried me.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Well," said Wilbur Knowles, as he rushed into rehearsal the morning of the day I was to make my appearance in a New York theatre. "Well, it is ludicrous that the whole company must sit around and wait for those blasted stage hands. Gad! but I'd like to put the whole beastly union in the sweat box and see how they'd like this nerve racking business."

We were to have a full stage setting, and we had been sitting on boxes and odd chairs since ten o'clock and it was now past eleven, while he had skirmished around for the property men to get things going.

"Say, Grey, let's do it ourselves," and he jerked off his coat and Grey and the rest of the men followed suit, and soon it began to look as if we would get a rehearsal after all.

We knew our lines and were well up in the business, for we had been working faithfully, so the rehearsal proceeded without further interruptions, and Mr. Knowles' nerves gradually settled into something like calmness. He was a very nervous man and seldom attained the perfect freedom of a serene condition. He was all over the place generally, especially when he was getting his lights and shades to the picture.

I knew my way between the hotel and the theatre, and that was all I had seen of New York. It meant

work for me to step into Miss Courtland's place and do her part. I was not an actress, though I loved the thought of lending myself to the portrayal of life. I worked hard, taking little sleep, and, as Mr. Knowles watched us at that last rehearsal, I knew he had seen the tired lines around my eyes. When it was over and I was about to hurry away he was by my side, whispering:

"Take a good long sleep, Miss Elsa, it will be trying business to-night. There is a full house, too, and I want you to make good, little girl."

As I retraced my steps to the hotel I realized the full truth of his words. I was weary and tired all over. I threw myself on the bed and slept soundly. When I awoke a delicious consciousness of rest lay over me, all the tired feeling was gone. I stretched my arms far above me, reveling in the sweet freedom from weariness. That first dear moment of consciousness, when the soul returns from its wanderings and again enters the body, awakening it to renewed vigor, is a wonderful moment. That moment of awakening, when we clasp the threads that bind us to this world, and begin again the unwinding which sets the soul free that it may soar in the beautiful daylight of consciousness.

I had planned to get a glimpse of the Professor's studio this afternoon. I should draw in the harmony of life and sing better on this, my first appearance as an actress, after such a communication. I had given the visit up when I had fallen asleep, but it was still early. I felt so completely rested that I decided to carry out my plan. In dressing I put on a simple gown of my village days,

one he had seen me wear. It made me feel I could find him better in the strange surroundings of his studio, where only his spirit now hovered.

I sought the address on a little card written by his own hand, hurried out into the thoroughfare. It took me past Twenty-third Street, and there I inquired of a policeman. He directed me into one street and to the right on another. At last I saw a rather shabby building ahead of me, worn and weary-looking, as I had been a few hours ago. A small box of an elevator took visitors to and fro. I stepped in, and we slowly crept to the top, and there I was left in a narrow dark hall. I groped my way as the elevator boy directed and timidly knocked at a door he designated. The door was opened by a foreign-looking man. I knew I should find some one occupying the place. I had carefully arranged in my mind what I should say to win me a few moments of silent thought in the room, where so many bewildering revelations had sought my teacher, now cold in death. But this individual that bade me enter was fierce-looking and unapproachable. How could I persuade him to my purpose?

I had never thought of a jarring element where the Professor could only have left harmony. This new tenant was enveloped in a long black coat, held a violin case in his hand, probably he was just going out, as his hat lay ready on a chair near by, and so my intrusion was ill-timed. But I had come far and could not forget what I had wished to gain, so I sat down as he ungraciously motioned me to do. Neither of us spoke for some minutes. I was trying to find a way to begin, and he, bound

silent by the strangeness of my actions. At last I drew in a nervous breath, timidly looked up, found two glowing eyes turned fiercely upon me; 'twas the fierceness of a nature keenly alive rather than an unkindly expression, for he had become conscious of my embarrassment. The look gave me speech, whatever its character. I stood up fearlessly before him and waved my hand around the room.

"Isn't this the studio apartment where Professor Camden lived?" I almost whispered the words—an awe had crept over me, for I felt his kindly spirit very near.

"Yes—yes, my dear, this was his studio, just as he left it, furniture and all."

In my absorption the familiar tone of his address was quite lost, and I listened, my face full of eagerness as he continued:

"I had a studio farther down the hall when he was here, but I bought his furnishings and took his lease when he died."

"Oh! isn't it beautiful that you could? He was such an inspired one!" I cried. "His genius revealed truth for truth's sake. He wandered through his day here, like a spirit straight from the world of harmony and peace, and was not bewildered by the tumult and disorder where he walked, but drew a pale veil of beauty over the imperfection in the valley, where he found himself. Those whose fingers have touched his, can dream dreams of perfection, catch fragmentary glimpses of a dim, mystic light, that is slowly rising to clear our vision, turning anguish and sorrow into a God of love that is being

shaped out of the mist and darkness where we grope, even as the dear Professor."

I had forgotten my listener as I spoke—surely the spirit of my teacher was near me for all timidity left me as we conversed. Ease of speech came to us both, and a soft graciousness spread over his countenance, replacing the forbidding fierceness of his reception.

"You are new to New York?" he questioned, leaning toward me and relinquishing the violin case.

I looked at him startled. Had I so quickly exposed my village rearing?

"I have been here only four days," I answered. "But why do you ask? Do I wear a village garb? To think they told me this costume was the latest cut!" and I laughed. "That I should be so taken in!" I added, and I met his look freely. That laugh and simple confidence established a quick friendship between us, at least he made it serve such an end.

"Do you want me really to tell you why I asked?" he said, leaning still nearer, his elbow on his knee, his keen eyes riveted upon me.

"Yes, oh, do!" I urged; "the knowledge may keep me from further exposure, and I don't want to heap ridicule upon the village I call home."

My face was full of mirth at such disaster to a nobody from nowhere. Of course he could not see how amusing the thought was, so I had my fun all to myself.

"After a while I'll tell you. Take a look around the studio now, and let us speak of the little I know about your Professor."

We chatted on over the quaint studio; here were

pictures of the old masters, busts of especially loved poets, and between the windows stood the piano. Invisible fingers drew me to it, and my hands sought the white keyboard impulsively.

"May I sing in here just once?" I cried, and marveled at my boldness. He was sitting in the far corner of the room now, and silently nodded—his eyes expressing their consent in a new language to me, but one in which I felt no interest, so absorbed was I in a deeper emotion. Once more my lips framed the tender words of Tosti's "Good-by," as they did on that other day. Oh, such a peace, such utter oblivion descended upon me as I sang, that I forgot my surroundings.

The strange, strange studio, the tempestuous man sitting in the dimness were as nothing to me. I was back in the old brick house, *let furnished*. Once more I was waiting for my mother's summons to that other room where he lay dying—Professor Camden—and now I was here fingering the keys of his piano, sending a quiver through his beloved studio, the words of a song his lips had taught me to sing.

"Isn't it sweet that cherished memories linger in our hearts?" I murmured, as the last word of the song left my lips, "that they linger, to sweeten all the days of our lives, and at some needed hour we can lift the lid of our treasure box, as I have this hour? Dear jewels, given to comfort and bless!"

A knock at the door recalled me to the lateness of the hour.

"Oh, I must go!" I cried, suddenly conscious that this was the eve of my first appearance in New York.

"You know what a first night means, don't you? But I needed what I have found here to make it a success," I added.

"I will tell you now why I thought you new to New York," he answered, closing the door that had unlatched, and standing in front of it. I was still sitting at the piano, my fingers lay warm upon the keys, my eyes still held the visions of the past in them.

"Do tell me!" I said, forcing myself into the present.

"You want so much out of life, my dear. Your nature is calling so loudly. You are so full of enthusiasm, you are unwearied in your eagerness. You have ideals, and believe in them; to sum it all up, you are alive, and not dead like most I meet, but you need love to help you on."

He was at the piano now, but I was still absorbed, and would not recognize the jarring element in the dear Professor's room.

"I must go," I said, "and I do thank you for letting me feel at home here. It is almost as if my old friend had given me welcome. You are right about the ideals. I have them, and I shall keep them unsullied in the bewildering mazes of your city. Oh, I am glad I am a country girl to you, if to be that means to be radiant with the beauty of truth."

He picked up his violin, as I arose and buttoned my coat.

"I will go with you, if you don't object," and he opened the door and waited until I passed out. As he closed it I saw written on the glass *Max Frieder, violinist.*

"I am coming to see you to-night," he announced, "to hear you sing. What theatre?" he questioned.

"The Bijou," I answered dully, feeling no interest.

"I shall be there. Will you let me know you better, Miss—Grier, did you say?"

"Yes—Elsa Grier," I innocently added.

"Are you going to the theatre now, or to your hotel?" he asked. "I can start you on your way, if I know."

"To the theatre, Mr. Frieder," I said, using his name for the first time. "I shall be glad of guidance in the right direction. I am afraid of the turns to the left and right; another evidence of being a country lass, you see."

I accepted his friendliness because I had found him in the Professor's rooms, and felt nothing wrong in such a meeting—'twas as though we had met through him. We hurried along through the now crowded streets. It was growing dark, and shadows lay close to the tall buildings.

"I shall see you again, Miss Grier," he said, as we reached the block where the theatre stood, and his gloved hand was outstretched for mine, while his eyes glowed like two coals, so earnest was their expression. I read nothing in their depths but a soul awakened, and keen to the joy of living. I felt no desire for food as I entered the side entrance to the stage door, but found my dressing room silently. I could not eat with these emotions stealing over me, so I sat in the dark in a large lounging chair, that tempted, to let thoughts have their way.

CHAPTER XVII.

Gradually the dim twilight that filled the room on my entrance gave way to the deeper blackness of night. How I enjoyed the great easy chair. The trailing of the long shadow fingers charmed me, as they crept over the wall, at first faintly outlining the dressing table and the photographs standing there, then obscuring everything in a total darkness that even my eyes could not penetrate. Their gentle way of caressing each picture and touching my dress like a benediction fitted into my mind.

At six-thirty the door was pushed gently ajar and a voice said:

"Are you there, Miss Elsa?"

It was Liza, a negro woman Mr. Alexander had engaged for me as maid.

"Yes, Liza, I am here dreaming in the dark. Come in. It is a good thing you came promptly, because I was relying upon you to rescue me from wandering too far away in my thoughts. You had better go next door and get me a cup of tea and some toast. I don't want to grow faint as evening lengthens. I cannot eat much, I am too excited, and then we are to be entertained afterward at some club. Just get tea, and never mind anything else now, Liza."

She turned up the lights, and was gone. She

promised to be a treasure, I could feel that. She had quiet ways and was remarkably intelligent. The make-up troubled me more than anything else. It was difficult to put the paint on evenly and the trick of lengthening my eyebrows took an amount of time that horrified me.

One of the women of the company had given me a long lesson, and Charles Grey had added the finishing touches. Yet it was the part of the preparation that I disliked most, and I started in on it first to get it over with and out of the way. I had my cheeks like two roses, when Liza returned, tray in hand. This she put on a chair, so between the adding of a dash of rouge and a line of crayon, I sipped my tea.

The stage, on this, my first appearance in New York, was set for a summer fête. Mr. Knowles had taken great pains with this opening scene. He had studied the lights and shades till the harmony of color was perfect. Nature had found her way through doors and windows, and gave of her loveliness liberally. A fountain sent perfumed sprays into a pond where lilies nodded sleepy heads. There was an arbor effect upon one side. Flowers and growing plants were everywhere, even springing up on the winding paths at unexpected corners.

The gown I was to wear was a delicate pink. It would blend into the dark rose tints of the growing flowers in the garden. When I stood ready there was a knock at the door. It was Mr. Grey. He opened it at my bidding. A look of surprise stole over his countenance as he surveyed me resplendent

in the shimmering silk that held the values of rose petals as it fell gracefully about my figure.

"It is very becoming, you quite startle me," he said. "May I wish you luck?" and he stared intently at me for a moment, then, as if recalling himself, added, "I came to show you this," and held the evening paper toward me. "Just look it over, it will give you confidence to know what they are telling the public about you—Alexander never puts it on, either, as some managers do."

"I can't sit," I said, laughing, "I might muss it," and I made a grimace at my dress. "I can read standing just as well," and I sent a merry little twinkle into my eyes, then glanced up at him. "It's quite like my first party, or a birthday dance, and you——"

"I am your first beau—eh, Miss Elsa?"

After so reckless a remark he dared a second look into my eyes, and disappeared, as he should, for I was blushing furiously even redder than the paint. I looked at Liza to see if she had heard, but her face was like a bronze statue, still and quiet. If she had noticed she made no sign.

I opened the paper wide and read, "There are a number of attractive features about the play at the Bijou to-night. One of them is the new leading lady. Born just out of New York, yet it is her first appearance here. Circumstances gave her a taste for the stage, although it is as a singer she first thought to appear in New York. The two most interesting facts about her are—she is young, good looking, and as yet unspoiled by contact with a selfish world. The regular patrons of the Bijou are

promised a treat when Elsa Grier steps on to the stage, and when she casts the spell of her voice upon the audience she will win hearts in spite of being a stranger and unknown to the theatre-going public."

I had never seen my name in a real newspaper before, the two sheets published daily at home could hardly be called a paper, and it made me draw a deep breath. I could not fail to-night—no, not after visiting the Professor's studio, and surely not after he—Charles Grey, had thought me beautiful. I could not disappoint him or Mr. Alexander, who had given me this opportunity.

Another knock at the door, this time it was a long box.

"Oh, open it quickly, Liza!" I cried. "Roses—and such roses!"

Our country blooms would look small beside the wonderful full-petaled blossoms tucked away so carefully in that florist's box. Who could have sent them?—no card was in sight. It was only after I had lifted the last blossom out of the box that it came into view, and then it was almost hidden away amid green leaves. Who ever gave them, wanted the soft rose-petals to charm and bewilder me, before the giver of so much loveliness disclosed his name.

There it was, a thin white envelope. I tore it open, drew out the card, and read "Max Frieder." What could it mean, his remembering me? It sent a thrill of delight through me. It was all so new, this homage and attention that was coming to me.

"I'll put one in my hair, Liza, if you will shorten the stem. It is dark red, and will blend with the

dress all right. I would wear it, though, if it did not harmonize. Don't you think kindness is always harmonizing, even if done up in disagreeable colors, Liza?—I do. There, it just fits in that wave of hair, back of my ear, and will be whispering to me all the evening."

Max Frieder, sitting near the back row, made the same reflection as he watched the slender girl figure move here and there about the stage. The current of his feeling was powerful, his eyes glowed with desire to pick this living blossom and wear it in his bosom.

"Last call!" came echoing through the thin partition, as I stood admiring the effect of the rose in my hair. It made me appeal impulsively to Liza, standing mute and solemn-eyed, by the window.

"You don't think I'll fail—do you, Liza?"

An awful fear clutched at my heart. Before she could answer, Mr. Alexander's head was in the doorway and his face was aglow with smiles.

"My! what a vision of loveliness, Miss Elsa. I just dropped in to tell you to keep up your nerve. There is a fine audience, not one of your cold first nighters, but a host of real lovers of the drama. I can size them up in a minute, you bet, and I gave the whole lot a good looking over before coming here. Just you go ahead and be your own earnest self and forget about the feathers and gew-gaws in front. I'm banking on you, Miss Elsa—sort of feel I found a real pearl back there in that off-the-map village of yours."

"I won't disappoint you, Mr. Alexander. You have been too kind."

"You said those words once before, my dear. You made them good then, and I believe in them now. I don't make mistakes often. That earnest little body of yours can act, and when you sing it won't really matter much how you act, anyway, eh, my girl?"

"I hope so."

"Well, good luck! The orchestra has begun and I must get back where I belong," he said, as he disappeared.

He had come in like a sudden whirlwind, but he left strength behind in his words. They turned my thought away from failure. Liza went with me to the wings and I stood waiting.

It was over, my entrance. Yes, and quicker than I can tell about it, I was on the stage. I went through the scene, never missing a cue; that was what had worried me most, the cues. I forgot all about them as the act opened. I found myself in the midst of merry feasters. He was there, Charles Grey, and it changed from a play for me into a real fête. My imagination was my dearest possession. It opened up vistas for me that whirled me along with events as real as if I had been whisked off this planet on to another, where I was somebody else, somewhere else.

Every one was light-hearted and gay. The arbor and flower beds lost their artificial look under the dim, shaded lights. I was bewitched. I teased them all with my merry ways, and him especially, as I did when we walked under the elm trees; but he was bolder here in the part, and took liberties that startled me, that sent me to my dressing room,

as the curtain descended, with heart beating wildly.

We were recalled, and Mr. Alexander led me on to the stage. Oh, how grateful I was to him for doing that! I dreaded the calling before the curtain, and he knew about it, for I had confided my fear to his wife; how I thanked him in my heart! The play continued until the curtain went up on the last act. It was the scene I had counted on most, for I was more at home in song than anywhere else.

Could I have done it without Charles Grey? I hardly think so. There was strength in his mere presence in the picture when I appeared. The touch of his hand calmed me and his eyes melted away in mine, for they spoke to me of many things as we went through our parts.

He caught my hand and whispered in my ear, as I was about to leave the stage after the curtain had gone down; it was the first dark moment before the stage hands take possession of everything. "Let me see you home?" and I consented.

I had forgotten the supper, as had he. We both recalled it later as we met on the street in front where the party awaited us.

I don't remember the place to which they took me. I was conscious only of the dim lights, the babble of voices, the cozy tables, and the music that tried to drown the noise of busy tongues. There were eight of us, and, upon entering, I was separated from Charles Grey, but in the arranging he held the seat beside him and motioned me there. I came at his bidding, much to my dismay. But so

many things were happening to me this night of nights that I soon forgot the incident.

"And now for the toast of the evening," said Wilbur Knowles from the far end of the table. The supper was well on its way, and every one was smiling with that content which marks the satisfaction of the inner man.

"Here's to the success of our songbird, Miss Elsa Grier."

"I drink to that," said Mr. Alexander, rising to his feet, and his dear lady threw me a kiss across the table, as they clinked glasses. I was being whirled along, I knew not where, only the ecstasy was with me, and of that I was conscious.

We walked to the hotel under the stars, my arms filled with the roses of Max Frieder, and my thought with the man at my side. It was over. I was really out in the great world alone. Would fate continue kind to me and lead me in pleasant paths and by the still waters of peace? There was a tender pressure on my arm. In two dark eyes a look that gave me faith. I turned my face upward to the stars and was unafraid to take the next step forward.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The clock on the mantel of my room chimed the hour of two as I entered. I had found two letters under the door, and as I turned on the light I discovered a box on the table. I was eager for one of the letters. I knew the dear handwriting. It was hers—my mother's. I needed her words before I could really hug the joy of success to my heart. The chief pleasure in praise is the certainty of some worth, and this I wanted to come from her. I felt wide awake, as if it were the early morning hour. I went to the window. Outside, the great world slept. At far intervals tiny lights sent out steady rays, drawing home, perhaps, misguided feet. The sky was an intense blackness unbroken by the flicker of a star. I had never known the terror of life, and the dark heavens only awed me. They could not shadow the love I felt over, above, and around me. 'Twas but a deeper glimpse into the depth of life.

Perhaps sorrow was in the blackness, but I knew love was there, too, and I was not afraid. Leaving the window, I turned on the lights over the dark oak dresser. The tiny room was now in a blaze, and revealed to me a smiling face in the mirror. My hair hung around the face reflected there, in careless ripples. Just enough of my make-up clung

to my cheeks to give the faintest tinge of color, and there was youth in my eyes.

The rose still nestled in my hair, but it drooped, and was fading. I had forgotten its existence. The charm of its beauty had not followed me into the sanctity of my bedchamber. Poor, faded rose—it had given its life to me. I pulled it out of my hair and tenderly stroked the velvet petals. Nothing had been withheld. Its sweet odors had surrounded me, and the tender pressure of its leaves had given courage.

“Dear rose—sleep—you have mingled your life in mine,” I whispered, as I stood gazing at the reflection in the mirror. Suddenly my lips quivered. Then, after a silent struggle, my eyes closed over welling tears, for I was alone on the evening of my triumph. But I had the letter, and hurrying into a wrapper I tore it open.

“Elsa dear,” and I was lost in the closely written pages. I leaned back in the chair, smiling and satisfied once more. What a beautiful night it had been. What a beautiful night! I hugged my letter to my heart, and was it fancy that I felt the exquisite nearness of her presence? My eyes would constantly revert to the white pages to find sentences here and there that particularly pleased me. What dear letters she wrote! I had never known before the charm of her written thought, and I re-read from the pages before me eagerly.

“Betsy is well,” she gossiped, “and lies at my feet constantly. He seems to have lost his desire for roaming about at night. It must be because you are not here, and he feels the responsibility of keeping

me company. I am lonesome for you, child. I close my eyes at night and bring you before my mental vision. Last night the moon tempted me into keeping awake later than usual. Its pale rays flooded the garden and changed everything to silver.

"Dear moon, giver of dreams, it almost blinded me with the wonder of its light, for the moon rays search the innermost parts of our being. As I watched the silver glow, veiling tree and leaf with beauty, I sat dreaming far into the night. I have a confession to make, Elsa, I fell asleep. As I leaned back unconscious in my chair the fairy fingers of dreams soothed me away into the world, where I have so often rocked you in my arms. In my dreaming I walked along the ragged edge of a barren waste. It was a desert, and it was called Life. I knew it, for I have traveled in its wilderness many years.

"Suddenly I left the desert behind, and before me was a tangle of thorn bushes. I pushed them apart, the thorns pricked my flesh. Through the opening I saw a green meadow. Elsa, as I sat thus alone dreaming, bathed in the moon glow, there was a bird trill calling me to the green meadow. It was a voice long silent. It came in answer to a cherished hope of my heart. What can it mean, child? Is my wandering soon to be over, and is heart's-ease the flower I am to wear on my bosom? Biding that time, my soul is hushed to quietness and calm in communion with you, dear child."

Thus the letter ran on, and I tenderly kissed it as I folded it away in the envelope. I had forgotten the larger missive. It lay neglected at my feet,

where it had fallen. The bold type looked up at me from the floor and aroused me to a sudden curiosity. It was but a few lines of congratulation from Max Frieder. He would call in the morning. I hardly knew whether I cared to receive him. Yet there was a certain magic about him that fascinated when in his presence. Once again, as on that restless night when I had sought quiet in my mother's bed, a deep yearning stirred in my breast. A burning desire swept over me to do something noble and sincere in life. I had entered the world with a heart full of love to lay upon its altar. I was full of sympathy and trust for all men. It was not a strange thing, I mused, this desire, because she had told me so many times that my heritage was love. How tender and true must have been the tie that bound them together—my mother and father.

But it was getting late, I must go to bed. I started to turn out the lights when I spied the box on the table. Violets! and for me! How soft their color and how full of tenderness. They have a language all their own. Their purple loveliness sent a thrill of rapture through me for I knew the giver without a glance at the card. I put them on the pillow of my bed and turned out the lights. As my lids grew heavy each flower-petal spoke to me. In their tender fragrant hearts I found the fulfillment of to-morrow's dreams.

CHAPTER XIX.

Three weeks passed and we were still playing to crowded houses. Mr. Alexander's round, ruddy face was extended in a constant smile. His eyes, always laughing, had caught an extra twinkle, which lay in their depths to flash jokes at every one with their changing hues. He had not forgotten the passion of enthusiasm, and fairly bubbled over with fun, from his height of approving interest.

One night as I stood waiting my entrance in my little box of a dressing room he knocked. His solemn tone of voice, the affected quiver of dignity in the words uttered, sent me guessing as I called out cheerily:

"Come in, thou stern bearer of tidings. What has happened, my liege lord? Thy tone portends a sacrifice to the Gods. Of all the Gods, worshipful Sir, which do we serve on bended knee this auspicious night?"

I caught up a long veil, and, reckless of curls, threw it over my head as I finished the last word. With a grand sweep of my palm, I bent humbly before him. I was a child still, having known nought in life but happiness.

He was a child, even as I, because success had smiled upon him. The imps of gladness are thus all-powerful when they control.

"I have good news for you, little girl," he said, helping himself to a chair. I sat on a stool near the door. His voice was big with joy, and his hands played with a rather prominent watch fob as he spoke.

"Our cup runneth over—eh?" he continued.

I was all attention now. I could see that the quick change from frivolity and banter to this serious countenance meant something. I glanced toward him eagerly—my still eyelids told of absorbing interest.

"George Carton, the artist, is out front," he said. "He came to me in my office after the first act and asked me all about you. I gave him a pretty fairy tale; managers get in the way of doing that, you know. But I told him the right thing, Miss Elsa, you can bet on that."

I sent him a look of confidence, and said:

"I could not doubt that, Mr. Alexander."

But he continued, seemingly absorbed in his story:

"He was here last night and heard you sing. He is mad about your voice, and you. He says your music has soul in it. That you bring messages to hearts."

"Oh, he didn't!" I cried.

"Yes; that's true as I sit here!"

"If I could always believe that I have in me that power over hearts! If I could sing cheer into lonely ones—hope into the bone and fiber of the hopeless ones! If I really could do this, Mr. Alexander! Show the world that God is love!"

He sat before me half mystified, following me as far as he could.

"Music of the heart, that's the way he put it, Miss Elsa. I rather liked his ravings, and that's the truth. He is a poet-painter, they say, and one must look for emotional work there."

I was almost deaf to his words, I was still lost in the suggestion they had given me.

"He brought his wife to-night," he continued, "and she is delighted with you, also."

"Too much praise," I answered, blushing. "How can you expect me to descend from so high a pinnacle and go on in the next act?" I laughed.

But he ignored my playfulness, and said: "She is one of your china-doll affairs, Miss Elsa. At least, that's what they tell me," and he winked. "We haven't come to New York for nothing, have we, my dear?"

I had heard of the pictures of George Carton. Only last night they had been under discussion with Max Frieder, as we chatted after the matinée.

"Is he a painter of nature?" I asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Alexander, "but I have heard that his great talent is in portraiture. Of late years he has put it aside, they tell me. His wife is one of the swells, my dear, and a stunner for looks. His heart is in a little circle of artists that frequent his studio. He loves his work. I have seen one or two of his efforts, and, take my word for it, his paths of green through the branches of his elm trees lead straight to eternity. Even I can feel that, and I ain't much on poetry, am I, Miss Elsa?"

I held up my finger reprovingly, and he went on.

"He seemed so eager to have you sing that I consented. It is the proper caper, I guess, to cultivate

a few of the top-notchers, eh? His wife is on the top round, too. At any rate, I promised that you would come. How about it?"

The distant sound of the orchestra rose and fell on my ears. It was almost as the accent of a loved voice, and sent my pulses beating in time with the fascinating rhythm of its harmony.

"You deliver your message well," I responded at last.

I smiled, my ears straining to catch the far-away melody. Something within bade me seek its soft soothings, bade me let it play upon me as an instrument for its use. I was young, and it whispered many things. I pulled the petals of a rose apart that I held, in my half abstraction.

"A morning musical, Mr. Alexander, did you say?"

"That's what he called it, Miss Elsa. A carriage will be at your disposal at twelve o'clock. I even promised to escort you, myself."

The room swam. Visions crept before my eyes. 'Twas the rose petals, they fell into the silent world of my heart. I was awed, as if an unseen presence floated in with the words of this invitation.

"Oh, if you would go with me!" I cried. "It frightens me to go among strangers. The faces over the footlights are easier to meet. To stand before the fashionable world——" he interrupted me, and laughed.

"I was afraid they would devour you, that's the reason I am going to get leave of absence from that good wife of mine and take you into their midst under my wing."

"I guess I am a very capricious girl," I cried; "foolish, too, and perhaps silly, Mr. Alexander; but your going will make the event my pleasure day."

"You are an arch-flatterer, my dear," he said, rising to go. "They have apartments in Central Park West. Here is his card," and he handed me the square pasteboard.

I read the name slowly, George Carton. I liked it, and told Mr. Alexander so as he turned the handle of the door and disappeared in the dim light beyond. I repeated the words many times, lingered over them as one lingers when speaking the name of one loved.

The lights and shades of the distant melody came indirectly to my ears as before. The sweet sound sought me in my dreaming, and led me blind into the bewildering joy of a deep emotion. I stood transfixed before my mirror awaiting my summons to that other world on the stage.

"George Carton!" my lips kept repeating. I tried to picture the kind of man that two such strong names would fit. In fancy I drew a mental outline of his face. How completely commonplace sounded the words "Last Call" through the empty corridors that led to the various dressing rooms.

This was a living event, the coming of this man into my life. I was sorry that the orchestra had stopped playing. Its harmony fitted my mood.

"George Carton!" I murmured as I left the dressing room, following Liza into the wings.

"George Carton!"

CHAPTER XX.

The days came and went, and the morning of the musical arrived. The sun lay in the heavens as a gold mantle over the world. It came into my room, to flood it with warmth, and veiled my arms as I stretched them above my head lazily. My face reflected its cheer, and the lids of my eyes lay heavy upon my cheek, so deep had penetrated the glory of the sun in their depths. I stood hesitating at the door of my wardrobe. My fingers strayed tenderly over the soft fabrics, hanging still and silent upon the black hooks.

For a moment the figure of Mrs. Aiken passed before me, and once more my heart warmed toward the grim woman, who had made all this row of loveliness possible for me.

"Which shall I wear?" I asked aloud, addressing the finery upon the hooks. "Which?"

Instinctively I reached for the blue gown that had caught my fancy that evening of the long ago at home. I lifted it from the nail on the wall and laid it upon the bed. The silky folds of the dress lay in shimmering waves on the white counterpane. My hair was coiled loosely at my neck, and, turning to the mirror, I stretched a strand of pearl beads across the front, losing it in the coil behind. Then, pick-

ing up the dress, I let it fall quickly round my slender figure and stood ready.

I was gently smoothing the soft silk of the skirt when Mrs. Alexander entered, to see me in all my finery.

"You look a dream, child," she exclaimed.

I turned, struck a position for her benefit, affecting a wonderful air in my posing.

"You are a monkey," she said, coming toward me suddenly. I professed a humble submissiveness, and said:

"What shall I sing? That is the real issue at present."

And she laughingly replied:

"First, one of those high, trilling affairs to show off your voice. Then a love song to steal into their hearts."

"Oh, you funny dear!" I cried, and kissed her upon both cheeks.

"Max Frieder will be there, Elsa."

"And what of that?" I responded irreverently.

"What is to become of him?" she said. "It is growing serious. He is certainly in love with you, child. I can see the flutter of excitement into which you plunge him, every time he is near you."

I stared at her.

"Do you really think he cares so much?"

"He is absorbed in you, that's all. Which is it, Elsa—Max Frieder or Charles Grey?"

I was annoyed, there was a strange clutching at my heart. Charles Grey—there could be no joking when his name was mentioned. I hardly heard her bantering:

"Roses every morning! Letters every night! What is that but love, Elsa?" she asked. "And what is love?" she murmured softly.

The madness of teasing was upon her, and I laughed in spite of myself, and quickly suited my mood to hers. I gave a sudden whirl around her, and pinched her ear—one always did those things to Mrs. Alexander, she had so many pinchy places.

"I can see my good man deserted after the entrance!" she called to me. "I must go back, Elsa! Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No," I answered, "I am just about ready, when I look through my songs."

Again I was alone, and my thought reverted to her question, "What is love?"

That was what I wanted to know. I had seen it beaming from Max Frieder's eyes, and I had recognized it in the dark depths of Charles Grey's. Love—love! Was it soul? Was it a radiant light to lead into the infinite? I loved my mother. Was the love of man different? My worship of love grew and grew as I questioned my heart. I would know love, find my beloved.

Impulsively I opened my trunk, sought an old book of fairy romances, and read. I was but a girl, but it was the woman in me that bent over the printed pages of the old book.

It was the story of Cupid and Psyche. I fingered the pages lovingly, and read aloud until I was lost in the ancient tales.

"In a certain city lived a king and queen who had three daughters exceedingly fair. But the beauty of the two older though pleasant to behold, yet

passed not the measure of human praise, while such was the loveliness of the youngest that men's speech was too poor to commend it worthily and could express it not at all."

The quaintness of the language charmed me, and I laughed aloud at the jealousy of the Goddess Venus, when she learned of the worship the earth maiden inspired. How natural it has always been to long for homage, to suffer, as the Goddess of old, rise up in our anger, and hurl forth a full revenge upon the air. I could see the "old images uncrowned, the cold ashes left to disfigure her forsaken altars."

In her wrath Venus called her son to her and begged him to compel this maid, who had won the worship of mortal beings, "to become the slave of an unworthy love."

I wanted to read every word, but in my eagerness turned over the pages, leaving the jealous rage of the Goddess behind, seeking the part where Cupid had found Psyche, and then I read slowly and tearfully of their happy love days. How Cupid had started forth to carry out the wishes of his mother, fell under the charm of the earth maiden, and took her as wife.

Their blissful hours together followed, until doubt and distrust separated them. How the flight of Cupid awoke love in Psyche! Then came her long search over the wide world. "Poor Psyche!" I murmured, letting the book fall into my lap while into my eyes crept an understanding of what love in a life could mean. "She left the footprints of her devotion everywhere," I whispered under my breath.

And where was Cupid? I turned the pages quickly and read:

"In his mother's house he could no longer endure the absence of her he loved, gliding through the narrow window of the chamber where he was holden, fled forth swiftly and coming to the place where Psyche was—then penetrated with vehement wing into the highest heaven to lay his cause before the father of the Gods."

The forgiveness and the welcome of Psyche into the presence of the Gods followed. I turned to the last page and read aloud:

"The seasons crimsoned all things with their roses. Apollo sang to the lyre, while little Pan prattled on his reed and Venus danced very sweetly to the soft music."

"Thus Psyche was married to Cupid after she had drunk from the pot of immortality." She awakened into the high service of love.

It was a sweet story. The Gods had known the truth of Psyche's love by the footprints, and meted out her reward liberally. Would I know the footprints? I let the book drop into my lap, in my deep abstraction. The story charmed me. The incompleteness of life without love, how terrible. To know love! Would I know the footprints of my beloved?

The warm midday sun still filled my room, lay on my lips, and hushed them to silence and trust.

"All ready, Elsa?" said Mrs. Alexander, opening the door. Her entrance was unexpected, and I jumped up in a fright.

"Why, where were you, child? I thought you expected me back."

"I did, but you left me with Cupid hiding in the corners and bewildering my senses. You asked me questions about him, and I have been trying to answer them." I laughed as I flew to the elevator to join Mr. Alexander below.

We reached our destination after a short ride, and ascended the long stone steps. It was a dingy-looking building, not a regular apartment house, but an old aristocratic mansion converted into two flats.

I was ushered into a quiet little chamber, far from the one where the crowd of guests were removing their wraps. I was alone in the room a moment before entering the salon beyond. It looked like a place of magic, as I opened the door a tiny crack and peeked out.

Mr. Alexander caught me, and I opened the door wide and stepped bravely forth. I bent my eyes on the ground, a habit of mine when that shyness, so a part of me, appears in the presence of strangers.

A few steps, and I gained courage and raised them. I lifted the lids wide and they opened on the countenance of a tall dark man. His black hair was graying at the temples. His lips were thin, and grave, and firmly set together. Each feature was as familiar to me as my own. *It was my father.* I clutched Mr. Alexander's arm.

"That—man—there, who—is he?"

I was a few steps in front of him and Mr. Alexander could only discover whom I meant by following the direction of my eyes.

"The man by the door," I cried, "at the entrance into the drawing-room!"

"There, he is speaking to a lady at his side."

"Oh," answered my beaming companion, not noticing my excited condition, "that's George Carton, our painter and your host of to-day."

"And the lady?" I whispered, a terrible agony trembling in my voice. "The lady!"

"His wife," answered he innocently.

I turned my eyes away, they were wild and staring. My face was deadly pale.

"Elsa, girl, what is the matter?" said Mr. Alexander now fully awake to the trembling that had me utterly in its control. He put his arm around me and half lifted me back into the little room I had just left.

"Shut the door a minute. Wait outside, won't you, Mr. Alexander?" I begged.

"All right. Is there anything I can do?" he asked, his ruddy face full of kindly concern. "I'll come back in a minute, Miss Elsa, if you don't appear. Remember, I'll be right outside if you want me."

I could not grasp the situation at once. My mind groped in a dark chaos. I had been hurled amid the terrible boulders unprepared, I fluttered in the darkness, and there was no bottom for my feet to rest upon. There could be no mistake. I knew every line of his countenance too well. My father! My father!

I dwelt on that loved fact, as one will, before peering into the abyss of torture. Cautiously I crept to the edge. I looked beyond his dear eyes, the

eyes we had gazed into so often—my mother and I.

I crept on beyond the eyes, past his tall figure, and into the very torture chamber of suffering, to face—*his wife*.

My mother was—oh! God, what was it the world called my mother? His mistress! And I—what was I? God help me! The child of shame!

The abyss closed around me—closer and closer. The cruel edges cut into my soft flesh, and it was torn and bleeding. The child of shame? Poor mother!

Tears had their way—I wept. The child in me dying—the woman born into a world of suffering.

CHAPTER XXI.

A deadly faintness came over me as I crept to the door. I knew it must open, and that I must turn the knob. A hush was all about me, the hush of fatigue. I was suffocating. It seemed as if the whole world held hard, cruel fingers at my throat and would choke life out of me. I stood breathless before the closed door as a bird within the leafy shelter of some tree ere it wings its way over the smoke-begrimed roofs of the city.

Suddenly there was a timid knock. I turned the knob.

"They are asking for you, Elsa," whispered Mr. Alexander. It was an awkward moment, and, man-like, he was flushed with embarrassment. His evident distress calmed the tumult in my breast.

"I was just coming—just coming," I repeated, looking up at him, longing to have a good cry or tell some one how it hurt. I called upon every power within me to fly to my aid.

I commanded my heart to cease its wild beating. I pinched the color into my cheeks. One last effort, and a wan smile crept to my lips. He took my hand and patted it.

"Poor child, you are ill. We have worked you too hard."

He took a firm hold on my arm and guided me down the long hall that opened into the music room.

It was all in gold and white. Beautifully gowned women were grouped here and there. He, my father, stood by the piano as I entered. I saw only him. There was magic in his eyes, they charmed me, and before Mr. Alexander could pronounce my name, my hand reached for his.

"This is George Carton, Elsa—our artist."

There was no need of pinching my cheeks now. They were crimson. My fingers rested in his warm clasp for just a moment, and when they were released a yearning to throw both arms about his neck nearly broke down the wall of my control. But the longing was strangled at its birth, as he said in low, even tones:

"My wife, Miss Grier," and gracefully brought me before a lady, the centre of a group by his side.

She was a tall stately woman, and she was beautiful. Upon her white skin there was no blemish. Not even a line marred her fair countenance, her eyes were clear and transparent, the problems of life had rested lightly, their clear depths remained placid, unstirred. A wonderful gown fell about her. It was soft gray and silver. Yes, she was beautiful—but a statue.

Was I really a part of this glittering assembly, I asked myself, as I turned serious eyes upon her. My lips moved, but no sound escaped them. I bravely swallowed the tears in my throat that had gathered there to choke me. Once more my lips moved and my voice mingled in the conversation.

Speech came slowly at first, as a child stutters when learning to talk. It was true, I had been hurled into a dark cavern. Thrown amid harsh

overhanging horrors and bidden to be calm and quiet in the deep blackness where I stood, looking into a yawning chasm. I must awake and free myself once more from the jagged rocks that cruelly cut into my flesh.

I smiled bravely into her face, and, obeying a voice within me, my words were kind. With restless eyes I glanced about me as we talked. I was now in the midst of a critical world. My dress touched the lace of its fair women, and the men looked upon me as one of the bevy of smiling charmers that hovered around them.

Fate had guided me into their midst, for the woman within me fled from this scene of unrest. These smiling ones, these beings clothed in feathers and laces would cast my mother forth, brand her an outcast. My mother—who lived a beautiful life far from the haunts of men. She never sought the praise of the world as she toiled on, pressing the stitches in and out, holding her love sacred, to a memory. My mother! Oh, I was wretched as I stood there pale and still.

My lips framed careless sentences, but my thought wandered, puzzling over everything—uncomprehending, lost in the tragedy of the situation. Why should I grieve? I demanded boldly. There seemed to be two of us. One the woman that stood calmly waiting to add her mite to this feast of Orpheus, the other a spirit that questioned and would not be silent. Why should I grieve? What was there to grieve about? My body was straight, lithe and strong. My skin soft and white. What had I been deprived of, that I mourned?

An ideal, perhaps, yet not a true ideal—that is never lost. We may throw aside its outer coverings but the heart of an ideal remains. It abides with us forever. I was a child of a noble passion. My mother had told me that, as she had taught me to love my father, and in that last hour together had she not made me promise always to love that father? Did she foresee this meeting, and had she, all my life, been preparing me for it?

How holy, sweet, and pure she looked as she appeared before me there amid this bevy of people; a spirit of loveliness. I knew there was naught in my heart for her but love.

Max Frieder was coming toward me. I could see him elbowing through the crowd and waving them aside as one does a tangle of blossoms in the wood. There was a deep earnestness in the grip of his hand on mine. I was glad to have him near, and I gave him just a glimpse into my heart as I welcomed his coming.

A glimpse, not of love, but of the woman awake, and seeking her own. I had no word with my host beyond his greeting on my entrance. But I felt his eyes upon me, and had caught their serious gaze as I unconsciously searched for him when for a moment I lost sight of his tall figure. He seemed drawn to me, and there was a puzzled cloud over his face as he wondered wherefore? I knew why his eyes searched mine. Dear father!

“Are you nervous about singing,” said Max Frieder, catching my wandering eyes and bidding them to his own.

“No, I shall be glad to sing. I am restless. My

thought is riveted upon myself, and to sing will get me out of the I, into another bigger, better being."

Mr. Alexander had disappeared. He had slipped away when he had seen me regain my composure. The chatter of tongues still continued, and I, so accustomed to quiet ways, fretted inwardly at the delay of the program. At last a voice, a strangely familiar voice, spoke. I had heard that voice, where? In another world, perhaps, or it had been wafted to me in my dreams. A voice strong, tender, and deep—the voice of my father.

"May we have your song now, Miss Grier?" he said, touching my arm with the tip of his finger. I turned quickly, and, giving a vague hint of my desire in a forced smile, followed him to the piano. I do not remember how my song was received. The blood was dying my face crimson, I saw the trembling of my hands. I felt old, worn, and out of tune, but I did my best. I tried to find the thread of my song, but I only stood at a distance and watched the word-picture my lips were framing as one apart.

"Take me away!" I whispered, turning to Max Frieder, as the last note echoed through the room. "Take me home!"

There were gentle spirit fingers drawing me. I longed to make an end of it and go. Before he could answer they led him to the piano, and I nodded that I would wait until he had finished his part of the program. I slipped into a tiny oriental room opening near where I stood. He lifted to his shoulder his violin just as I found a chair and dropped into its comfort. I had never heard Max

Frieder play. At the first drawing of the bow across the strings a nervous tremor passed through me, then a quietness penetrated my whole body. I was lulled into forgetting.

He sent quivering through the strings a tender low pleading strain, as if he would force me bodily into the control of a vibrant potency that would draw me as clay into his arms. I could see that he was at home in the midst of these beautiful women. They flocked about him as he finished. He belonged to them, was their idol. I should have been gratified at his eagerness to come to me, hid away in the dim light of tiny lanterns, but I was only conscious of his coming, that he might bear me away from the lights and the constant din of voices.

It was nearly five o'clock when we successfully slipped out into the cool air. Ah, when the door was closed it shut away for a moment a world of suffering and torment. I drew in the fragrant evening ozone, and memory was stilled. My tongue was generally busy when with Max Frieder, but there was an absence of word banter that I knew he noticed.

He held my arm close, perhaps he felt a yielding about me that was new and strange. I yearned for sympathy, comradeship, and unconsciously I sought it from him. The voice of his violin spoke to me as we walked along in silence, for I had begged him to dismiss the carriage.

"Let us go to my studio and I will 'brew you some tea,' as an old Scotch friend of mine says." His voice was low and pleading.

"That is just where I should like to go. How did you know?" I cried, looking up at him, tears in my eyes.

"You are worried about something, my dear girl," he said, and there was a slight pressure on my arm.

Sorrow was on my heart, but there was beauty even in sorrow, if it brought real sympathy like this.

"What sort of man is our host, Mr. Frieder?" I inquired, forcing our conversation into the themes I longed to discuss.

"Fine fellow," he answered heartily. "Rather moody and to himself, though. You don't get a glimpse of him in the social whirl once in a century. He paints, and paints, and then paints, and that's all. He had a severe illness years ago. He almost died, so I have heard. By the way, he has a most interesting studio, and there is a mystery locked away in it. A mystery that every one has tried to uncover, but in vain. His mystery is shrouded in its impenetrable veil."

"What do you mean?" I asked, thoroughly excited.

"He has one side of his studio wall completely covered with a heavy brown hanging, that is put on in such a way that it defies all curiosity seekers to penetrate or lift even a corner. Perhaps you will go there some day and can see."

"But here we are," and we entered the tall building of the dear Professor's time. As we ascended in the elevator the negro in charge said:

"Some one waitin' up there, Professor."

"All right, Bob," he answered, as he opened the

door, turned on the light, and then excused himself.

I sat down to the piano and leaned my head upon the keys. The touch of the ivory was cold, but I went beyond the outer chilliness and found the spirit hovering in the still keyboard. It was my dear old master's spirit that came out of the cold and dark to comfort me.

Suddenly I hear angry voices in the next room. A woman's name was muttered in harsh guttural tones, and then the words "Are you mad?" came quivering loud through the thin partition. There was a great passion astir. The suppressed sound of weeping brought that to me, and I raised my tear-filled eyes wonderingly. My imagination knew what was going on behind the closed door.

"Why did you come here?" shrilly questioned the man. He veiled the sharpness well. I hardly recognized the hard tone to be that of Max Frieder—but it was.

Indignation grew upon every feature of my face. Determination stole into my heart. My whole body quivered with suppressed emotion. I looked about me vaguely at first, a terrible anxiety in my eyes. I could picture a rabbit caught in the hunter's trap doing the same thing. I could see it pull and wrench the wounded part free until it succeeded. I could even see the little flying figure, the ears erect, scudding cross country into the shelter of the leafy bushes.

I found a pencil on the corner of the piano, and, taking down the piece of music from the rack where

it stood, I wrote: "I still carry my ideals unsullied." From the next room came the words:

"Here is the money—now go—you have been well paid, and I am through with you. Do you understand, Marion, I am through! When I have worn out a string on my violin I replace it. My love for you is worn out. Remember that, and never come here again."

I still held the pencil in my hand. Over my face a horror hung, a dread, an awful dread. I hastily added the word, "Good-by." I then put the music back on the rack, and, like the snared rabbit, fled. Out in the deepening twilight I hurried, I feared the tightening of some invisible forces about me, to chain me there.

My heart ached. Yes, I suffered. My ideals were bruised and bleeding, but I held them to my bosom and hurried on. Max Frieder was a hunter, and I was afraid; even as the rabbit of the sportsman, in the open field.

CHAPTER XXII.

There was a hansom standing to the right of me, when I reached the street. The man lay sprawled out luxuriously in the high seat. He was asleep, tired out from entreating the public for its patronage. The cabbies of New York worked hard, and long hours of service weakened their power of endurance. I called to him. He was awake and alert in an instant.

At first he could not follow the sound, and stood up, peering eagerly in front, for the voice summoning him. Finally twisting around on all sides, he spied me as I waved my hand in his direction. He snapped his long whip to enliven his lanky beast; it stood motionless, dead to sight and sound, even as its master had been.

The horse responded quickly as if accustomed to sudden flurries of excitement from the heights above him. The driver made a wide sweeping curve in the street, and reached me in less time than I can tell about it.

"I want to drive for an hour," I said as he drew the shambling animal to a standstill and opened the doors of the hansom.

"Leave me at the Bijou after that," I added, and stepped in.

It was a cold night. I reveled in the frosty chill

that was abroad. My cheeks burned, and the stinging winds cooled their fever.

I cast no backward look at the building beneath whose shelter my dear master had lived. I knew his spirit had left the scenes of his inspiration, driven away by alien hands. He loved harmony, and there was no harmony beneath the roof of his studio. A false note had been struck, and its vibrant tone still echoed. But I carried away in my heart the note of memory. The wonder of his mood had taken flight and left the imps of darkness to reign alone.

My wraps were scanty and a shiver ran over me as the zephyrs beat upon me. I still wore the blue gown and it was low in the neck. The soft, thin, lacy material clung to my shrinking body as if to warm it by nearer contact. I paid no heed, I was absorbed. There was not a nerve or muscle off guard, and I knew no fear of the gale. Ah, let the wind blow! (Its fierceness was a caress.) The emotion stirring through my body had taxed its endurance to the uttermost, yet I would not succumb. Let the winds blow!

The evening lengthened, and uncaring, I leaned back in the dirty, time-worn vehicle with wide staring eyes, seeking every object that flitted across their vision.

We drove out Fifth Avenue, people were hurrying by; the day's labor at an end, they sought the shelter of home. A room was home in New York, and why not? Love is the wall, the roof, and the foundation of home. Love is not limited to space. It is not brick or stone, size or shape, love is love, and

love is home. This may sound vague to others, but not to me.

The street was lined with carriages. We moved slowly, the horse turning in and out, guided by skillful hands and the ever-flourishing whip.

I sat, my fingers interlaced, my lips drawn tightly shut, uncaring. I had no idea of time, my brain was tired. I was still in the midst of my pain. The struggle had been intense, and now a new patience was settling over me. I endured and was calm, yet I wanted to move on and on. I wanted to forget life itself, run away from it, into nothingness, where there was peace.

A sudden jerk. The lanky animal responded to the pulling of the reins heroically. He braced his two front legs sturdily upon the slippery asphalt, and, drawing all fours bravely together, landed the hansom in front of the theatre entrance. I raised my eyes, yes, it was "The Bijou." There were the lights over the sidewalk. But what was the name of the attraction they outlined? I looked closer, surely nothing dimmed my sight. A dizziness swept over me. Was there no forgetting? The lights spelled the title of the play: It was called "The Bastard." It looked different to-night. I saw it for the first time, it seemed. It was real now, though not the tragedy of a youth, but of a maiden. I rebelled. I could not go before that restless crowd.

They stood outside now patiently waiting their turn at the little window. They pressed hurriedly through the door of the theatre. It was late, but I had no consciousness of that. I was reaching out

in the darkness to find courage, or a deeper horror. A light that would raise me into the heights, or cast me deeper into the hell of despair. The burden was becoming too heavy and I was sinking beneath it, when the face of Charley Grey rose before me in all the strength of its noble manhood.

It was a face like my father's because the courage and the truth were the same behind the masque of life—of different countenance, but of the same mold in manhood. Charles Grey! What would this hurt, that had come to me mean to him? Would it lessen me in his eyes? Oh, God, have mercy! I cried in my heart. I called to the cabby to drive on, and he did as he was bidden. What would they do back there in the theatre? There could be no play without me. It was too late to fill my place. I could see them hurrying frantically about, and what would "*he*" think? I was a coward, turning my back at the first approach of the enemy. The goodness of Mr. Alexander flashed before me. The long days of study with the dear Professor in the old house *let furnished*—his birthplace—Charles Grey's!

Then I was flung back on myself. I must minister unto my need, there was no hand near to ease my pain. Oh! I could not be a coward—I would return, I would be brave. My mother had ever been strong. I was the child of an inspired love, not the offspring of a weak passion. I would go back. Perhaps the darkness was but the shut door into the garden of rest.

I called nervously to the cabby above. I poked my fingers through the little window over my head and said:

"Hurry back to the theatre, quick—quick! Do you hear, quick!" The old horse did his best. One clumsy hoof, then the other, beat upon the pavement. With a jerk of the reins we once more pulled up before The Bijou. The crowd had thinned out. "Oh, how late could it be?" I cried, as I opened the door. My purse—where was my purse? I had not taken it to the musical, knowing of no need.

I bade the man wait, and hurried into the theatre. Mr. Alexander's office was empty. I frantically approached the man at the window selling tickets, but just then the clerk of the office came running toward me. I explained my need, and then flew round to the stage entrance. I had hardly reached my dressing room when Mr. Alexander came in without even knocking and quite breathless.

"You have given us such a fright, Elsa," he cried. His ruddy face was really pale, and he smoked furiously upon the stump of a cigar.

"The orchestra has commenced the overture," he said. "I telephoned everywhere. Can you make it, child?" he asked, in a shrill, unnatural voice. "Can you make it? And where were you?"

"To-morrow, my friend—to-morrow," I answered to his last question. "To-morrow you shall know."

"But would that to-morrow come?" I said inwardly. He fidgeted about, poor man, completely unnerved. Wilbur Knowles came to my rescue, and I pulled him impulsively into the hall. Had he seen beyond the deceitful calmness I had assumed into my quivering soul?

"I am here now, Mr. Alexander," I called out. "Don't worry, I'll be ready on time!" and I shut the door upon both of them. Liza had my shoes off and my coat had fallen to the floor.

I was terribly calm. "The blue dress is all right, Liza. The audience will like the change, don't you think?" I asked, in as careless a voice as I could summon. "Just hand me a wet towel and I'll have my make-up on in a minute."

"You did give us a scare, though, Miss Elsa," she persisted.

"I am ill, Liza. I thought I could not do my part to-night; but I will, and you will help me, won't you?" In my need I touched her arm, and my lips trembled.

She saw that I was unhappy, and her fingers flew to do my bidding. The paint and powder hid the troubled lines in my forehead. The weariness beneath my eyes was erased as by magic, but the expression in their depths remained, as if to mock at artificiality.

"Have you had supper, Miss Elsa?" timidly asked Liza, her dark face full of anxiety.

"I could not eat it, my good woman. It would choke me."

She felt her mistake, and hurriedly put two letters into my lap.

"I brought them over from the hotel," she said, a little gladness irradiating her countenance. I seized them fiercely. The brush and comb fell to the floor in my eagerness. I drew in a deep sigh. It was the touch I needed in the dark, where I stood, a

word from my mother, and it had come. What mattered now? The garment of my despair fell away, while I opened and read her message to me. But I could not read it all, for the orchestra had stopped playing.

Outside my door I could hear the gentle hurrying of feet to the wings. I was ready, too, and among them as the great curtain slowly rolled to the top. I was there, the central figure in the gay feasters. The garden scene had lost none of its fascination, life looked as beautiful amid the roses as it did yesterday at the *matinée*—yes, there was even a sweeter fragrance amid the blossoms. Or was it my imagination? My feet trod the same paths, but some of the petals had fallen. It was the blossoms I trampled beneath my feet that filled the air with fragrance.

"Verily," I sighed, "the heart is like a flower which yields not its sweetness till it be crushed."

The play was over. I stumbled into my dressing room. An awful fatigue gripped my being. I was dizzy—a black monster rose before me. It would clasp me, I could feel its long, powerful arms reaching—reaching. It looked me straight in the eyes and seemed to say "You are mine!" I clutched at the back of a chair, my eyes grew big with terror. My tongue was paralyzed, I could not speak. The blood had left my veins, I was cold. Oh, it was so cold, and the long arms came nearer and nearer! A great terror was upon me.

The weight of mountains bore me down. I could not scream, I could not weep. Suddenly the black monster crept away, a soothing voice calmed my

fear. The lids lay heavy over my eyes, and the voice of despair that cried aloud in my heart was silent. Then there was nothing, no pain, no more struggling, only peace. I had fainted.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The shock of my irregular birth had come to me like a heavy blow from a hand I loved. It was life, the fate of life that had struck me speechless. I spent hours and days thinking about it. I stared at the facts in blank consternation. I could not realize it. I could not understand. My father lived but a few blocks away. I loved him with all my heart, yet I could not touch his hand. I could not tell him of her, back in the cottage. How patient and good she was and how her fingers ached with the in and out of the stitches. The joy of finding him I must chain in my heart, never set it free to throb in the air about him—my father.

I sobbed these days of unrest. I sobbed the life out of me. What was the matter with me? I asked myself this question many times. But no answer came. Was I going mad that I could not find the light again? I struggled bravely with my thoughts, endless thoughts that came to sap my energy.

I awoke one cloudless morning, still trembling over what I had learned. My being was filled with a longing to go to my father and claim him and tell him of her. I even made plans of how to carry it out, and the words I would speak. Why should I waste a day? I was nearly twenty years old and

had never known the touch of a father's hand upon my life,—only the picture to fill the place of flesh and blood.

I tried to drink in the mood of the sunbeams,—their golden light lay over me as a blanket of love. But I could not give myself into their keeping. My face was turned to where the shadows fell. I was still amid the storm waves, and my vessel had not even sighted land.

The problem of life still faced me and was still unsolved. The wings of my soul were being tried for the first time. For the first time in my life I walked in the valley of sorrow, and I was alone there, though I had fluttered as a bird over its low windings, when a child, as I sat with my mother in close communion.

A valley is full of richness. Was it possible that my valley would yield a richness to me? My soul was wakened into real living. Life was all so different from what I had thought to find it. It was a struggle of souls, and at once I knew the fierce battle my mother had faced. Must I yield all my dreams? I held a bit of paper in my hand. It was a line from Charles Grey, and read:

“Will you drive with me at three o'clock?”

I had seen a great pleading in his eyes since the night I fainted. It fascinated me. A whole week had passed since then. I was ill, yet I would not let them know, but in his eyes something said:

“Tell me what it is.”

“How could I tell him?” I said aloud, in answer to my whispered words. I could feel life slipping away from me and hid in my room that none should

suspect, except when I was at the theatre. I felt the whole world was watching and waiting the result. I was ashamed of the weakness that held me, and some hours I rose up free and happy-hearted, but sank down helpless after only a step.

To-day I would make another effort. I would go with Charles Grey into the world of action, and the glad out of doors might change the range of my vision.

"May I come in?" Mrs. Alexander smiled at me from the hall and stretched out her arms to me as she spoke. I rested my head on her shoulder as I whispered my answer:

"Of course, you are always welcome, dear friend."

I gave her hand a gentle pressure, and said, "I am going to drive with Mr. Grey," she smiled, and a merry twinkle in her eye made the smile full of meaning. I blushed, and a lightness of heart came in the tinge of color that spread over my cheeks.

"I just wanted a look at you, child. I'll be off now. It's nearly three, and you are not ready." My visitor opened the door and was gone. I did not try to detain her, I liked being alone these days.

* * * * *

Every minute for the next two hours I breathed in ecstasy. Some drives are different from others. My drive seemed filled with constant surprises. They crept before my vision and tempted forth my eager enthusiasm. My eyes feasted upon the winding road-ways, the sudden wooded spaces now bare of leaves, and the quick turns into newer, sweeter glimpses of nature,—a nature emptied of all. Cen-

tral Park was beautiful beneath the cover of late fall.

Memory is the yellowing page of past joys. We write upon the pages of to-day that we may con them over to-morrow. I printed the sweetness and charm of this drive on the memory scroll of my heart. Some hour I could live it all over again when the edges were worn and frayed.

My companion was silent, letting me drink in the tonic of the fragrant zephyrs. We entered a road called "The Retreat." It was guarded at the entrance by two stately elms. They were tall and soldier-like of aspect, fit sentinals to so enticing a pathway.

"The fairies surely hold nightly revels here," I cried aloud, drawn out of all bitterness of thought.

All around us lay the city, but it seemed a great way off. The trees standing stripped of their glory were even more beautiful than when the leafy splendor was upon them. The sky was above me, the real rugged soul of nature was about me, at my side sat Charles Grey, and at that moment I was content. We had seen very little of each other of late, but he had grown into my life. I could feel the tender shoots of friendship for him taking root in my heart. Would that friendship flower into love? I was glad that I had come out into the sunshine with him. The ideal in "him" would not crumble in my hands.

I turned my face toward him as the thought came and met a look in his eyes that I had never seen there before. They were off guard; I was confused and rearranged my hat to avoid his discovering my em-

barrassment. He started to speak the language of his eyes, but thought better, for his words changed to a simple announcement:

"We have arranged to visit the studio of George Carton, Miss Elsa. Will you join the group?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed," I responded, so quickly that I imagined he marveled at my impulsiveness. "I want to know him better," I went on. He turned his head in my direction. I could feel his eyes upon me, and then the horse was suddenly urged forward.

He was confused at my interest in the poet-painter. There was a throbbing in my heart. It was like a madness that called for expression.

"By the way, I believe he has some pictures in the Metropolitan. Would you like to stop and see them, Miss Elsa?" he asked, as we came in sight of the museum.

"Oh, yes, do stop, I love pictures!" I cried. It was growing late and we hurried faster, that we might just get a glimpse. He put his horse in charge of a negro boy, and we ascended the long flight of steps. It was nearly closing time, and we sought only the paintings we had come to find. They were in the centre gallery. Two large canvasses, one was a field of clover with the rain upon it. I felt the wetness of the rain as I stood there. The pale, tiny clover-blooms drooped their heads in the down-pour. There was just a hint of brightness through the clouds, as if the artist could not resist adding a dash of hope to the charm of an otherwise gloomy scene.

The other picture was an oak tree with the prom-

ise of a beautiful spring all about it. But the tree was barren and dead in the midst of bud and leaf. There was a loneliness about the picture that affected me strangely. It had a tinge of fulfillment in the color strokes, and the harmony of the arrangement was perfect, but I felt the artist himself was the dead tree. It was a hopeless picture to me, for the great tree permeated the scene. The spirit of the lonely man had gone quivering into it, and it spoke to me. It stood, a soul that would never know another spring, although nature was abloom upon every side.

"We will have to go, Miss Elsa," said my companion. "There comes the guide to tell us it is closing time."

He took my arm and led me away. I could feel the tenderness of his heart toward me in the touch of his hand. He bent closer till his face almost touched mine. A softened mood was upon him, was love bidding his lips speak? I could not let them utter those words—to-day. Not to-day my heart cried—perhaps never!

I shook myself loose from his care and forced the cheer into my countenance, and flung frivolous words at him mercilessly until the seriousness left his eyes. A dumb hurt expression flitted over his face, and he mutely questioned my attitude. Why would I not let him speak? I could see that he was misled, and I was sorry, yet I could not listen to love words now. I was not able to tell my story to him—yet. I would never risk another hour with him alone, I promised myself, as I took his hand in farewell at the door.

Mrs. Alexander was in the hotel office when I entered, and we went in to dinner together.

"Elsa, do you want us to send for your mother?" she asked, as we sat down.

"You are ill, I know it," she urged.

"Oh, no, don't do that!" I cried, thoroughly alarmed.

"You must not even write her about your fears. You won't, will you? It would frighten her. Oh! you will not, dear Mrs. Alexander?" I begged.

"But you are so pale and troubled-looking, Elsa. It worries me," she answered. "I want to comfort you in her stead, but I can't, it seems," she went on.

"No one can help me, my friend," I answered. "I will be myself in a few days."

I ordered a hearty supper, and laughed over it in my old-time way to prove the truth of my words. My mother must not know I was aware of my father's presence, I was certain of that. A great fear was upon me lest in my letters there had crept a line to worry her. I returned to my room and wrote to her at length before I left for the theatre. I went into raptures over the bricks and stones of the great city. I raved about the hurrying throngs, and ended the last pages by asking all sorts of questions about Betsy, so eager was I to cover up any little careless word I might have penned in my half dazed condition of the past week. The clock chimed seven as I folded the letter and hid it in the white envelope. I then rapped at Mrs. Alexander's door, and together we went to the theatre.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The first shock of finding my father was over; yet I still groped in the darkness and sought wildly for the light. (I was a girl capable of looking squarely in the face the problems of life.) I had been reared close to the beat of my mother's heart, and this had given me a power to reason and decide far beyond my years. I meant to live my life as she had done; her pose was strong and self-reliant. I was courageous, yet I trembled in fear that my despair would overwhelm me. A larger vision of life was before me, and I wanted to grow into its bigness.

It was the day of our visit to the studio of George Carton. As I sat in his presence it was the artist I saw before me, the father was lost. From the midst of fur rugs Mrs. Alexander beamed at me. A provoking little laugh curved her lips as she watched me with narrow, knowing eyes that seemed to say, "Have you added a married man to the list of your conquests?"

She was not the only one that stood apart and wondered at the admiration our host gave to me. Charles Grey was moody and silent, did he so misunderstand the artist's admiration for me that he was unhappy? The great room in which the group of congenial spirits was gathered seemed dominated

by a strange fascination. It was a little world of its own, endowed with its own wonderful law of attraction, as if under the rule and sway of unseen forces.

A mysterious charm lay over the most trivial details of the place. The light falling through the small paned windows shed an illusive color of romance over the couch and the rugs, and also the men and women grouped within. At once they were of the elements that controlled. The books on the table had their niche, and the pictures were the charm of the place, for in them the soul of the artist moved. One could forget all the discord, all the shams of life here, the soul was freed to soar to the heaven of its dreams.

With that strange hunger of youth for knowledge I bent over each picture of a portfolio. The artist was patient with every detail, and himself explained the mysteries of color and illustrated on a small box cover tricks of his brush.

"It seems as if I had known you always, Miss Grier," he insisted, as he let his fingers slip carelessly around the palette that he held. "Your face perplexes me—I might say it haunts me."

A ripple of laughter interrupted him. Wilbur Knowles was giving a scene from a vaudeville sketch he had just written. It was full of rare comedy, and his little audience was convulsed. The merriment drew us into the midst of the circle. A glow had sprung into my eyes from my father's question, and in another instant I should have claimed him, but for this interruption. His query lay on my heart so tenderly, like a child begging to know. Wilbur

Knowles was a privileged friend. I almost felt his familiarity intrusive, yet this might have been because I was shut out from their dear comradeship.

He told us of the ghosts that haunted the room, and advised us seriously to get away before sundown. His voice was full of pathetic pleadings of high and low intonations. His humorous face watched our host attentively as he flung recklessly forth the daring words. I expected my father to rise in his indignation and turn us all out. But his glance was forbearing, and if he flinched at the reference to the brown curtained wall, there was no expression of it upon his face. Each feature remained impenetrable, and the quivering sensitive heart-anguish was unsuspected by all save myself. His eyes laughed good-naturedly, but the mouth was firm and unsmiling.

"Well, it's no business of ours," continued Wilbur Knowles, "whether the lady or the tiger shall step from behind the denim, eh, Carton?"

The hysterical humor I had worked myself into subsided. Wilbur Knowles was a wit, and I could not help responding to his banter.

"Well, I must be off, Carton," said our funmaker, and the echo of unholy laughter followed him as the door closed.

From a little room off the studio came the faint aroma of boiling coffee, and the tension from which I had suffered relaxed. Our host left us for a moment and presently pulled the curtains apart and invited us into a cozy little nook. I sat by his side, and opposite me was Charles Grey.

When I raised my eyes to his I saw he was watch-

ing me intently with a puzzled reproachful look. "You are not playing with me?" the look said. But the uneasiness of his stare made no impression upon me, lost as I was in the consciousness of a new relationship. This was my father, and I was happy. He was mine, and I laughed softly to myself.

I was too absorbed in the analysis of my own feelings to store away the bits of humor that passed over our cups. It was all there though, the joking, the quick repartee and I sat in its very midst and let the tragedy slip away. It seemed incredible that it could assume so comfortable an exterior viewed at nearer range.

"What a luxury not to be a slave to the moving hands on the clock's face," said Mr. Alexander interrupting my retrospection. His eyes wandered to an ancient time-piece in the far corner of the studio, as he finished his remark.

"Of course you would find the ticker, my dear," said his wife, in a half-scolding way. "All work and no play, you know"—she pouted.

"What is your part in the evening's performance, my dear madam, the lead or the ingenue?" he retorted playfully.

"I do the *ingenue* for you, John Hamilton Alexander!" and she waxed warm in her rôle of offended dignity. We all laughed. They were a devoted couple, this plain middle-aged pair, and the raillery was good fun. There was no covert meaning underneath the words, and its sharpness could be thoroughly enjoyed.

"I rebel," I cried, throwing myself headlong into

the argument; "I rebel, I'll not go. How's that, Mrs. Alexander, for a strong support?"

"You shall be tried and sentenced for stirring up strife, my dear," said Mr. Alexander, pulling down his vest front, to give emphasis to the scorching words.

"You will sentence me to what, John Hamilton? Life imprisonment with you? Oh, how dreadful! That the full limit of the law should be enforced upon a helpless female, that she should be thrust into such prison walls! What are we coming to?"

The firm lines around the mouth of our host gradually relaxed as we conversed. Then came a genuine brightening up of his countenance. A tender light crept into his eyes that I loved. It seemed as if the picture were before me. The likeness of twenty years ago stood out clear and recognizable.

"One last lifting of the cup, friend, and we will take ourselves off," said Mr. Alexander. The negro boy poured once more the fragrant beverage, and, seeing Mr. Alexander's anxiety rising, I took the lead and made ready for departure.

It was but a short call, yet I had seen my father. Another side of his character had been revealed—the real man in the midst of his work, the man that had won the heart of my mother. 'Twas the artist who had entertained us, and I felt I had ventured just a step into his world.

Where this step would lead me I did not ask. I only knew that my feet must push on in his direction. As we stood at the door I looked back into the room. If I could but stay behind and sit yonder in that shaft of light falling so lovingly upon the

weaving of the rug—if I could but recline there at his feet and tell him of her! The room spoke to me, as if supplicating, nay entreating me to linger. “Was he a happy man?” I found myself asking the question almost aloud as I let the rest go down the hall without me. I went over to the wall that a last view of a small print of Rosetti’s might live in my memory. It charmed me, and I started when a voice over my shoulder said:

“A wonderful symbol of divine love—isn’t it, Miss Grier?”

“Love is holy, don’t you think?” I asked, not noticing his question.

“Almost too holy ever to have perfection in this world, my child,” he answered, a tenderness in his voice. “Dante approached his through an angel. Love only lay over his pathway as a light that led steadily up and up. Perhaps it is best so,—but the way is lonely sometimes with the light, always beyond. You noticed the stretch of brown denim over there, didn’t you, Miss Grier?” he said, turning from Rosetti’s poppy-strewn chamber of dreams and pointing to the side wall.

“Yes,” I answered, and I blushed. It was the wall of mystery.

“Of course you have, how could it go unnoticed after that imp of a funmaker, my friend Knowles, drew such pointed attention to it. But I don’t mind him, Wilbur is all right, if he is a bit hasty. His hair is red, you know,” and a slight amused curving of his lips changed the whole expression of his face.

“Behind that curtain is a picture, Miss Grier. No

eye has ever seen it, since the hour I looked upon it finished. It is called a mystery by my friends. Miss Grier, if you will come here to-morrow morning I will unveil the picture for you. Will you come?"

I stood transfixed before him. I could not speak.

"Perhaps you wonder why I disclose my secret to you. I will be frank. I do not know why. There is a voice within that bids me draw the veil aside. Perhaps it is the hour for the child of my past energy to stand forth revealed. Who can tell the subtle impulse within us that prompts our actions? Will you come?"

I was hurrying to the door as he spoke. A thought of the waiting ones below had dawned upon me, and I caught my breath quickly at what they might think of my tardy coming. I trembled as I held out my hand in farewell, and the words:

"I will come," fell from my lips. Soft as blown petals flutter to the earth they echoed through the room, "I will come."

CHAPTER XXV.

Mr. Alexander was drawing his face into fretful grimaces when I joined them in the hall below. He walked toward the door and back again in a restless manner, that told me how irritated he had become over the delay. He felt impelled to wait my coming, but the forced waiting made the nerves nearly jump out of his skin. Poor Mr. Alexander! I hurried faster, as I saw him tramping about so irritably. I could not read the expression on his good lady's face. It appeared shadowed by a frown, but there was a kindly light shining in her eyes that gave the lie to the frown.

Charles Grey stood a statue by the door. I approached them like a culprit, a thoroughly penitent one, too. The full measure of dissatisfaction is not easy to hurl at a wrong doer under such circumstances. We paired off and hastened into the street. I pretended not to notice the humor of my party, but with a forced gaiety in my voice tripped along, wholly unconscious of guilt.

My escort was moody and preoccupied. We finally reached the hotel an ill-assorted group. Mr. Grey lifted his hat at the hotel entrance. Although he pushed open the door for me, I had grown annoyed at his ill manners by this time and gave him only a tilt of the head as he turned into the

street once more. Mr. Alexander had thawed out. The brisk walk and his dear lady's busy tongue had worked the change, or was it the thought of dinner? By the time we separated at the elevator, his genial smile had returned.

I went to my room, the walk had quite unnerved me. I had grown to love this little retreat of mine. I put off the garment of the world here; its worries fell away. I looked around as I entered. A stillness hovered over the place. Everything was in perfect order in the tiny room. How white and clean was the bed, the regular ticking of the clock inspired a poise that I longed for. That one searching glance brought me peace, and quietness lay on my heart as a blessing.

I had hardly closed the door and breathed in the still comfort offered me, when a knock opened it again. The bell-boy stood framed before me, and said as my eyes questioned:

"A lady to see you, miss."

"To see me?" I cried.

"Yes, miss, and she's been waitin' a long time," he answered.

"What does she look like?" I asked. The thought came perhaps my mother was below. I grew red and white by turns, my feelings rising recklessly between hope that it was she, and fear that perhaps it was not.

"Her looks, boy? Tell me about her looks; her face, her dress, her hair. Quick, answer me!" I cried, now thoroughly aroused.

"Really want to know, miss?" he smiled, and the

stretch of mouth looked hideous to me. Why would he grin in that awful way, I said to myself.

"Well, she's a crummy sort, miss, and that's no lie," was the information he finally offered, and then added:

"Tall and angular looking, miss, and say, her hair is surely oiled. Gee, but it's shiny and black and as flat to her head as the scales on a fish.

"Oh, it is Mrs. Aiken!" I cried.

"That's it. She pushed that name at me, but I forgot," he cried. "I ain't so bad at description, am I?" he asked. "I hit it off swell. You got the photograph instanter, didn't you?"

I was too excited to answer. I only urged him to hurry and to tell her I would be right down.

"All right, miss—I'm off. But say, she's got a gown on that would set you crazy, one of them changeable plaids. They's the latest figure, though; my sister's got one," he said, as he turned to do my bidding. "She ain't got the figger to wear it, though. It takes the slender kind of make up." I hardly caught his words, for I had gone into the room, leaving the door ajar.

I went over to the glass and looked critically at my face. The dark rings beneath my eyes must be erased. A good report of my looks must be taken back to my mother. It took but a moment to dash cold water into my eyes. The chilly plunge brought the life and brightness. I then returned to the mirror once more and added some of the mysteries that I had learned from my make-up box.

A quick repinning of my hat, a turn of the key in the door, and I was in the hall. A few steps and

the elevator ascended at the push of the button. A quick descent and an eager rush for the parlor on the first floor. When I first entered the room no one was to be seen. I started to explore, and there around the corner from the door sat Mrs. Theodore Aiken resplendent in the changeable silk gown.

She held out both arms, and I went into them as if I had always known the sweetness of their embrace, such kindly feeling does absence from home prompt in the heart.

"My mother, what of her?" I cried, drawing away from the tenderness of her arms. I looked into her face eagerly, "Is she well."

"She is, my dear child, and sent you this with her love," was the reply. A small package was put into my hands. My fingers closed over it fondly, but I was full of questions. I would wait, to know its contents.

"Why did you come?" I asked, "and when did you come?"

"One question at a time, my child," she answered. "That husband of mine came here on business, and I just calmly announced to him I'd come along, too. He was that taken back at my decision that he couldn't refuse, and so here I am. You know, my dear, I wanted to see you in my girl's finery."

A quick filling of her eyes told how her heart still cherished the memory of her lost darling. "I just had to come," she repeated, and she smiled through the tears.

"You shall see me," I said eagerly. "I will wear the prettiest of the gowns, and I will do my best to bring her image before you."

"It will be almost like having her come back, won't it, Miss Elsa?" she asked.

"I hope so, dear friend," I answered.

"I left Mr. Aiken at a meeting with some men. I thought maybe you and I would take a bite together. He promised to join me at the theatre," she went on.

"Oh, that will be fine!" I cried. "We will go down stairs and eat dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Alexander."

We found them in their own particular corner. As we entered the room they were poring over the menu. Their surprise at seeing Mrs. Aiken equaled mine. It was a merry party that gathered around the table. Mrs. Aiken beamed at me, and the flowers in her bonnet nodded, as she waxed eager in her conversation.

After dinner we walked slowly to the theatre. We had much to talk about. Her words were like a balm to my sore heart, they recalled to me my home. It was almost like seeing my mother, and a great longing filled my heart to hear her voice.

It was dark in the narrow passage when we entered the theatre. We groped our way in almost utter blackness.

"The electrician has forgotten the hour, I guess," I said, keeping tight hold of Mrs. Aiken's hand to guide her in my footsteps. When I reached the dressing-room door I turned on the light, and my snug quarters looked attractive after the gloom of our entrance.

The busy work behind the curtain bewildered her, yet she liked the attention she inspired. There was

a happy light over her countenance, and when I donned the pink dress, her hands trembled as they lay folded upon the soft silk of her gown.

I came toward her for nearer inspection, she fingered my skirt like a child. She loved each shimmering fold and caressed them as one does living things.

"You had better go out front now, Mrs. Aiken," I said. "That is the last call. Here is Mr. Knowles. You will take her around, won't you?" I asked.

"Must I go?" the poor lady murmured. "I won't see you again, child. We return on a late train. I wish I could stay another day."

"Oh, do! I cried, interrupting her.

"You see," she answered, "it's been a long time since I have stirred away from home. I would hate to have my old man return without me, and he says he must get back."

"Tell my mother how I look, won't you?" I asked, "and take this, and this, and this to her," I cried, as I kissed her on both cheeks.

Mr. Knowles interrupted our parting abruptly and led her away. But there was something to happen that would make me forget the good lady out front. I tried to find her amid the sea of faces, but could not. I turned to my part disappointed, to discover Charles Grey still thoughtful and morose. He carried the gloom of the afternoon into the play.

During the first scene his lips spoke words of love to me, but there was a hollow echo in the tender avowal of his passion. It nettled me. I knew Mrs. Aiken was watching every movement, and I wanted

to do my best. The enthusiasm would not come. I could not get into the proper pitch.

I tried in every way to bewitch him, and finally felt him soften. I never played the rôle better. Suddenly at the end of the scene he followed me into the wing, and said:

"Elsa, I love you. That was no fake scene to me. It was real." His eyes dilated, he caught hold of my hands and held them closely.

"Look at me, dear," he said, a great gentleness in his voice. "I need you, Elsa. The world is full of women, but I want only you, dearest."

A strange wistfulness came to me with his words, and for one moment I let my heart leap into my eyes.

"I must go!" I cried, trying to pull my hands away.

There was a moment of delay. My face was burning with the truth of my feelings toward him, but I could not let my lips speak them. There was a barrier between us. I made another gesture to go, but he still held my hands. It was dark where we stood, and his whispered words fell on my ear like music. Yet I forced myself away and left him standing there alone.

If I could but pierce the future, I sobbed to myself as I crept into my dressing-room. To have a heart that reaches out for its mate and to be cast by fate into the chamber of silence,—to have a wild longing thrill through my being, and day by day to strive and struggle, to sink back exhausted!

I rushed through the days in my thought, they were endless, and there was no love to shed its light

along the path. Once again I tried to understand the conflicting emotions that struggled within me. Once again I responded to the suppressed call that echoed through the empty corridors and stood waiting my next entrance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I had been unkind to the man I loved. For the first time I acknowledged passionately to myself that I loved. The sound of the words fell strangely upon my ears as I whispered them to my heart. *The man I loved.* A sigh fell from my lips. He was not near, only love was beside me—love, tangible and sweet.

“Then lifting up mine eyes as the tears came,
I saw the angels, like a rain of manna,
In a long flight, flying back Heavenward;
Having a little cloud in front of them,
After the which they went and said, ‘Hosanna’;
Then Love said, ‘Now shall all things be made
clear.’”

I loved. I boldly proclaimed my love. My heart sent quivering its messages of rapture. I loved. “Now shall all things be made clear,” I repeated again, and yet again. The words lingered with me to put courage into my faltering steps. I was limp and helpless—yes—and restless to get through the evening.

In the next act dear Mrs. Aiken was completely forgotten. That she was watching me came as a thought that had no meaning. I moved through the

scenes as one asleep. A dull apathy was upon me. I was a machine, all the parts were well oiled. Everything was in running order. My hands moved at my bidding, my feet walked in the direction they were guided. My whole being responded to the wonderful mechanism of mind, but my heart was in a heaven of dreams.

I had watched for the coming of love into my life. Love was with me and for one moment had lifted me on the tender intonations of his voice, into a world where angels wing. I drew in a quick breath and stood rigid with anticipation, not knowing what my next meeting with Charles Grey would mean to me. My mother! Unconsciously she was beside me—not forgotten in this real trial of my youth, not relegated away from the path of my life; there beside me she stood, visioned! Her presence was as real to me as the scent of a rose-jar whose fragrant odors rise in the air, when the cover is lifted.

Once again I seemed to hear her say, "My little baby you are all I have, you are all I can hope to have of love. How can I give you up—send you out into the world? How will it treat you? It mustn't hurt my little one."

It was hurting me. It was cruel, this world that I had entered. I had come clothed with youth to worship at its shrine. I had brought a heart unsullied, the sweet odors of the woods clung to my dress, and my hands were full of blossoms, but they were withering. Would the world scorch them? Would they die?

"O Mother!" I cried, "your prayer is unan-

swered." Suddenly her voice came to me as once again I waited my summons before that sea of faces.

"There is nothing to fear—out there," said the voice. "He is in the world of people—your father—nothing will harm you there, in his world."

How tenderly the words floated by me, wafted to me in my loneliness over the mountain of my despair. Dear Mother!

My soliloquy was interrupted by Wilbur Knowles. He stood back of me quite a minute before speaking. I felt his presence, but gave no sign until a laugh burst from his lips.

"Such a pensive maiden," he cried, "dreaming of God knows what!"

I smiled up at him. I was deeply fond of my stage director. He had been patient and kind in the hours when I had tried to follow the flights of his imagination. How often he had freed his thought and tossed us all as feathers into a breathing living world born of his enthusiasm. We had been moving lifeless before him, and he was the power that sent us glowing into the picture we were portraying. I was fond of him, was glad of his presence now.

"What would you think of me if I should really tell you of what my dreams are woven?" I asked, facing him direct, my eyes full of many questions. There was a pathetic arching of my eyebrows, and my voice stirred him deeply. I could feel the current of his sympathy for the unknown sorrow that clutched at my heart.

He laid his hand on my shoulder. "I would have your dreams happy ones, my little Elsa." There

was a quick filling of my eyes with tears at his words.

"Is not faith a strange virtue?" he went on. "I have had the faith to hope that some day a little girl, such as you, would bring love into my life—faith to believe? How oft I hear its echo over the far hills, and I am there! Down into the valley it glides, and I am here! In and out among the crowd that keeps life throbbing in the city streets. I have pressed on, grown weary of the path, yet ever on, and on, my faith lifted on high."

His voice died away with the words, and I looked into his eyes and knew how it was with him.

"Did you ever find her, Mr. Knowles?" I asked.

"Yes, Elsa, only to lose her," he answered.

"And you have kept your faith?" the words were spoken in a whisper, as if I were in a holy place and too much prying into its secrets would desecrate.

"I have kept my faith and still press on toward love," he answered.

There was an invisible tie between us. Suddenly my faith responded to his, and I said:

"My dream was as yours, and I will have faith, even as you. The world is full of happiness, and it is for you and me!"

It was peace that touched my soul as I left him to answer my cue. I paused, frightened. There sat Charles Grey in a large armchair by the fireside. The orchestra was playing a low melody. All was still and tranquil upon the stage, and in the dark in front I knew many countenances were eagerly watching the unwinding of the events of the play.

How vividly stood out the characters of the play. The old man just buried, the sorrowing son and the letters, mysterious and dreadful, that had stripped her, the mother of the bereaved boy, of purity and truth. Once again as that first time back in my home village, I was eager to enter and lend my aid to the lonely youth. My face was flushed as I stepped before the footlights—my entrance brought forth a gratifying applause, and I waited until it subsided. I had won admirers, and it pleased me.

I realized now that the play I had entered into for the first time in my home village had become a part of my life—was my life. It had been but a play then, yet I had thought it real. The sorrow, the puzzling of that poor bereaved boy! It had become mine now. By magic each event was poignant with meaning that pointed at me. I was Hulbert, the miserable son, grieving over his birth and the loss of an ideal. I would make Charles Grey know that it was for me that he must sorrow. I was the one irregularly born, though my mother had not sinned.

I would make it plain to him and then let his love decide. I was grateful for the stage setting of green life about me. Once again I went to the table as he had asked me to do many nights before, and the eager crowd awaited me again. The letters were open that would disclose his birth, the youth of the play. I read and re-read them and tremblingly glanced his way. Still following the cues of the plot, I reached his chair-back, and, leaning over, kissed his forehead.

"Now I can tell you how much I love you, Hulbert," I repeated. "I love you with all my soul, with all my being," and then leaning closer, I whispered, "I, too, was born as the youth of the play,—will you understand?"

The last few words were not in the lines. I spoke them impressively. It was to the creature of some writer's imagination that I spoke, but Charles Grey received the message. It was for him. The vast audience, my identity as Helène, the sweetheart of Hulbert in the drama forgotten, I was living my life, he, my beloved, must know of the obstacle between us, and I hoped the awkward sentence would disclose the truth.

The words had a far-away sound. Had I spoken them? Had he comprehended? The curtain slowly descended. An overpowering desire for flight was upon me, and before he could detain me I was gone. I rushed into my dressing-room and tore myself free from my raiment, sent Liza to call a cab, and with orchestra still playing, I was away beneath the dark sky of night. I had unveiled my secret before him, and I was terror-stricken, sick with fear, but he knew, Charles Grey knew.

CHAPTER XXVII.

That night I thought morning would never come. Morning, whose dawn would send over the horizon of the dire blackness that enveloped me, a little ray of light. Morning, whose song birds, astir, would twitter and trill with eager voices in the silence of my despair. What hope had I, that a new morning would ever rise to send bright rays into the gloom where my eyes looked? I had broken through the spell of control that had held me. Events *were* whirling me beyond my depth.

The stillness, the calm respose of night seemed unending as I lay feverish and wakeful. I stared out at the sky, the few stars that rose above my window flickered like a candle in a dark room, and my thoughts, unbidden, approached the threshold of to-morrow. As the night had deepened and I tossed in anguish upon my bed, a fury grew upon me. I became a creature swept away by events outside of myself. I did not like being hurled along, controlled by unseen hands. I would be master of my own fate.

Unconsciously I pushed the fiends back, that they should not impel me on, on, at their own will. I would rise out of my weakness and face bravely the result of my rash words. Why! why! had I uttered them? I cried aloud. No answer came, I was

forgotten. The world was asleep, and tears filled my eyes as I lay wide-eyed and lonely in my bed. I was but an atom, and there were millions upon millions of atoms in the universe.

One could lose the path and lie forgotten amid the briars. I sobbed. It was all over now, the sweet hope that had led me on dreaming through the days. Why should it be over? I sighed. If he loved me—why? (Could man's love rise to the heights of real testing?) I would know, the dawn would unfold. The curtain that fell between our souls would be lifted, we would face the naked facts, and I should know.

The world might point its fingers of scorn, but if the arms of my beloved were about me there would be no dread in my heart. I could rise above its criticism and look down from the heaven of my joy upon the folly of unthinking ones. As separate beings they were helpless, it was the united laughter of scorn that had power, and Charles Grey and I together could face that force undaunted. Was his love big enough to take my hand, go our way and face only the path ahead where to-morrow, divine and pure, made the worry of to-day a vision, but seen through half-blind eyes? I wanted his love—God knew the hungry ache in my heart. Thus the night crept slowly on. Gradually the blackness was lifted from the window-pane and the dawn crept to the edge of the sill as if begging admittance. Such a pale pure light, so new to life that it still had the hint of the Glorified Radiance.

It found me weary and unresponsive. I even stole out of bed, drew the shades close, and then

turned my face to the wall. Tired nerves relaxed as the full realization came that I must find rest ere the sunlight flooded my room. What a terrible punishment is meted out to us when tired eyes upon the threshold of sleep, weary utterly for the unconscious drooping of eyelids, yet cannot close. Then when the lids yield and press over the eye-balls, to pray for sleep, for utter oblivion, yet to lie ever awake—awake!

How dire the calamity that brings about such conditions! It was noon when I awoke. Upon the wall over my bed there lay a dim sickly glow. The sunlight through the curtains was yellow and pale. I felt like a mummy peeking out of his tomb. I extricated myself from the myriad weavings of thought that had bound me ere sleep had overtaken me. I knew how those, shut away from the clear, sweet rapture of day must feel.

I sent the curtains flying to the top edge of the window-panes, and a glorious radiant light flooded the place. The charm of the tender sky was upon everything. I then looked at the clock for the second time. Was it really noon? Yes, the big hand pointed directly to twelve. My promise to visit the studio of my father flashed across my mind. Could I go? He had expected me in the morning. Perhaps the afternoon would do as well.

I longed to see him, there was a yearning within that called me to his presence. I dressed slowly, and as I put the finishing touches to my hair the vigor of the new day was upon me. I had the café nearly to myself, when I entered. I enjoyed the prospect from the window of the hurrying throng along the

streets. There was a real interest in my heart as I sent my eyes searchingly down the long columns of the morning paper. The toying with my knife and fork amused me, so differently do events turn upon us under the broad sunlight of day.

As I sipped my coffee there were healthy thoughts stirring through my mind. I faced the horror of the night clothed in the garb of my youth, and there was no dismay upon my countenance. I was just dipping my fingers into the finger bowl, when a couple at the next table attracted my attention. She was a timid, meek little woman. A sort of far-away echo of the man opposite her. He was a big, well-fed creature, flashily dressed, a satisfied expression beaming from his eyes. Her flashiness was faded, as if the worn out part of his garment had fallen upon her.

Her figure was dull and spiritless. She was his echo. All individuality was lost in the superior quality of his. He ordered steak, she echoed, "steak by all means, John." No wonder he leaned back and surveyed the room, looking beyond her to explore. She was an open book to him. There were no hidden corners to penetrate. She had given without measure and he was surfeited.

They were hopeless, and my glance passed on to another couple on an angle from the table where I sat. They were young because of the animation that lit up their countenances. But the man had traveled the highway of life perhaps forty years, while his companion was surely thirty-five. They bent toward each other in earnest conversation. Their eyes sparkled, they made gestures with their

hands and their forms expanded. The waiter stood patiently near, on the alert for the first lull in the conversation. He held the menu card extended almost touching the man's ear.

His efforts were futile. It was laughable, and I smiled. Finally the waiter took a step nearer, and said in loud, persuasive tones:

"Beg pardon, monsieur, ze order. Voulez-vous ze fish or ze meat?"

The man waved him aside. I smiled to myself. It was a play, and I, an appreciative audience. Consciousness of the spiked coat beside them, now dawned upon the couple. They extricated themselves from the maze of conversation only to become just as earnest over the list of tempting viands on the menu card.

They were truly alive, and the joy of living was upon them. It was all very entertaining, this study of faces, but I must go. A letter must be written, there must be a song or two gone over, before I could free myself and keep my promise to George Carton. The tension of the preceding night had settled into something like a calmness, before the routine of the day. The quick beat of my heart was stilled; my nerves were quiet though weak and uncertain.

"God was still in the heavens, all was well with the world."

Two hours later and I was upon the street, one of the crowd whose feet tramped swiftly over the pavements. A glow of color suffused my countenance. I hardly recognized myself as the same half

frantic creature that had rushed from the theatre through the night.

Mr. Carton's studio was high in the clouds, in the top story of the building. I knocked timidly at the door. The dark skinned youth, who had served us, opened it. I entered silently, my foot falls made no sound. The throbbing life in the city streets was lost here. I had stepped into the heart of the Orient. The rugs with the tiger heads glowered fiercely at me. The windows were shaded with a woven fabric of silk and the chain of many colors added a subtle spell. It mantled everything, the mystery of many climes lived in the place.

"Is Mr. Carton in?" I asked.

"Yes, miss, he is painting in the next room. I'll tell him, miss, that you are here. Just be seated."

There was a sun room, as he called it, opening out of the main studio. He had told me of painting certain pictures there. I took off my jacket, found a comfortable chair, picked up a book lying on the table and waited. The book was a volume of Keat's. I turned the pages found the poem "Lamia" and read. Hermes, his flight and search for love fascinated me, as I re-read the vivid description of his ardor.

"A celestial heart
Burnt from his winged heels to either ear,
That from a whiteness, as a lily clear,
Blushed into roses 'mid his golden hair."

Then the appearance of the snake, with the power of speech, her sudden change into "a full-born

beauty new and exquisite," so absorbed me that I did not hear a step on the rug beside me.

"You have come," said a voice, and I looked up startled to find my father before me.

"Did you doubt me?" I answered.

"I feared you might forget," he responded, as he drew up a chair and sat down. We talked of many things, the snake-woman of the poem that lay open on my lap. We compared portrait painting with the outlining of nature, and the voice with the power of the pen.

A shaft of light through the dim fabric that shaded the windows to my left, fell over his face. His forehead was high and splendid with the fingers of heaven upon it. His eyes were fathomless, clear pools whose depths I hungered to penetrate. Through his hair a few stray silvered locks lay beside their fellows, but they only intensified their jet blackness. The hair was thin at the temples, the nose sharp and the mouth firm and close set.

I loved his countenance, and my eyes softened as I faced him.

"I'll leave you a minute, Miss Grier, I want to insure against interruption," he said. When he returned a faint flush tinged each cheek, lifting the general pallor. His eyes shone bright, I had never seen so enlarged a pupil. It was rimmed in the divine.

He approached the brown denim that curtained the wall opposite me. He pulled one corner from its firm fastening. Gradually the bottom was released and then the sides hung loose and limp. He motioned me to the couch that stood beneath the

curtain. I came at his bidding, my face expectant, was lifted to his. I was caught in the radiance that enveloped him. I waited, my hands, palm to palm, my eyes vainly trying to penetrate the denim.

For one moment he faced me, his back to the wall, the silence between us.

"I haven't looked at this picture for twenty years, Miss Grier. Old memories are surging in. They stir through my breast. There is almost a faintness creeping over me."

He turned quickly as the last word fell from his lips. His right hand gave a sudden jerk, and the painting was once more exposed to the light of day. The action dazed me at first. In the quick falling of the curtain, his tall form shadowed the wall, and gave me but a glimpse. I saw only indistinctly, but as my eyes became used to the scene an awe settled over me. My lids opened wide, my whole countenance was alert, and I stared intently. Slowly my eyes sought his, the whole truth of the tie that bound us, father and child, was in their depths. But his face was turned to the wall. He was lost in the picture. Once more I faced the canvas and a quiver of delight ran through me. It was my mother's face I looked upon.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"You like the picture?" he said, turning to me abruptly, his voice having in it a wail, a bitter, bitter loneliness. "You like it?" he repeated the words absently, and their sound sent a quiver upon the air, the heartache, that had been endured so many years. "I have named it—*Motherhood*,—for all of life is upon that square of canvas."

"How beautiful!" I cried, giving vent to an inward impulse that roused me to speech. "You are a portrait painter. There is the real tint of the soft flesh in her arm, and the flush overspreading her face is wonderful."

I flashed from my eyes hints of many words that lay upon my heart to be spoken, but he was far away in thought, yet I knew he heard what I had said, because his lips murmured:

"I never paint portraits now, and never shall let my brush follow the outline of the human form again."

There was a heaviness of death in his words. They fell on the air like corpses and there was a hopeless quivering in his voice that sent a chill through him. He still loved my mother, though he could see no turning of the road that might lead to her. I did a desperate thing, for I was ever impulsive. I took a step nearer to him, he was

gazing abstractedly into the picture, and I took his hand and held it lovingly between my palms.

"Tell me about the portrait, will you?" I asked as I gently led him toward the sofa. He yielded, not realizing that I was guiding him there at my will.

"There is nothing to tell," he said dully. "I put my life, my heart in that picture, and as one dead I walk through the world of the living."

He grasped my hand, his eyes were downcast and his fingers pressed firmly around mine. I let it remain in his clasp. It was a fluttering bird, safely housed. The world seemed far away as we sat there, and at last yielding to a force within that I could not disobey, I drew away my hand, went across the room, and took from the wall a small mirror that hung near the door.

He noticed my action, but did not question me. I sat down beside him again and held the mirror in front of us.

"Look!" I cried. He sent one quick glance into the glass and then turned toward me, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"What is it? I don't understand," he said.

"The faces!" I urged. "They are alike. Do you not see the resemblance?" He turned his gaze once more into the mirror.

"Yes," he murmured, "the same dark eyes, the cast of countenance not unlike. What are you telling me in the glass, child? What is it?"

A terrible anxiety shook his frame. "Did you ever have a child?" I asked, as I let the mirror drop

upon my lap. His face grew livid, his lips were white, and his speech thick as he answered:

"A child? No, never!" It was my turn to grow troubled. There was an appeal in my voice as I repeated my question.

"You never had a child? Never?"

A wistful eagerness quivered in my tone. I was puzzled. Why did he not know his own? I was wounded, and a terrible fear clutched me. I tried to lift the cloud that was settling upon me—I must penetrate it, find the light.

I arose and approached the canvas upon the wall. My fingers sought contact with the woman's face, as she reclined upon the low couch. I let them stroke the golden hair that fell about her, a veil of glory.

I drew closer, yet closer to the portrait. When my face was on a level with hers of the picture I pressed my cheek where my fingers had strayed and my lips whispered softly, "My mother."

The words were as magic to the man sitting near me. He was at my side in an instant.

"Your mother!" he cried. "How dare you sully the woman I love? How dare you?"

His lips threw the words at me harshly. It was the freeing of a nature, that for one moment shook off the bonds that held it under control. He grasped me roughly by the shoulders. The cold sweat stood upon his forehead.

"Your mother!" he repeated. "My God! what do you mean? Are you mad, child?" and he forced me upon the sofa, impelling my eyes to rest upon the fire of his.

"Yes, that is my mother's picture," and great sobs shook my voice. I was afraid. I had felt so sure of what I said, but his actions made me doubt. Once more I sent my voice fearlessly forth into the room.

"Yes, my dear mother looks at me from your painting. My mother, who is now sitting at home in our cottage pressing her fingers where the labor of her hands has supported me all my life—fitting me to enter your world!"

I hurled the words at him defiantly. He should know how she struggled shut away alone. He reached for my hand, and his tall form shook as with ague.

"Your father, child! Who was he?" he whispered the words, his breath was labored like that of a dying man, it touched my cheek hot and feverish as he bent near me.

"Your father!" he repeatd. "Who was he?"

I turned and lifted the mirror from the sofa once again and held it before his face. The silence that enveloped us at that moment was full of solemnity. A solemnity that reaches one only at the entrance of an old cathedral, which for centuries has gathered the sorrows of a nation within its vaulted ceiling, where faces have been lifted in prayer, and hearts have burned with agony, as forms bent low in supplication.

It was the stillness within the arches of an old cathedral that was about us as I lifted the mirror and held it before him. One moment his eyes found the image reflected there, but it seemed that he could not understand. I leaned nearer to his side, until

my eyes looked into his in the glass, and I whispered softly:

"The face reflected there is my father's."

"Impossible!" he cried. "And yet, dear God, is it true?"

I had never seen any one so utterly overcome. I laid the mirror on a chair and put my arms around his neck unbidden. The clasp of my embrace soothed him, for the trembling ceased.

"Is it true, child?" he questioned helplessly. "Are you my daughter?" His voice was old and tired.

"Tell me of your mother. Tell me of her!" he begged.

I drew a stool to his feet and did his bidding. I pictured the village where we had lived ever since I could remember. I told him of my earliest childhood, of the garden where the roses and heliotrope ran wild everywhere. I described each room of the tiny home, the stars in the painted sky, of my little bedchamber. Then I told him of the dear Professor and the gladness in my mother's heart that I was to sing. I dwelt lovingly upon the close comradeship that existed between us. He interrupted me to say:

"Yes, she was ever that. She was my pal, too, in the old days." I then described minutely the sweet curves of her face with the real light of motherhood upon it. He listened as one dazed and bowed his head as if in deep thought. Suddenly he looked up and again his eyes searched the picture before him.

"All my theories of life are slipping away, child—slipping away," he cried.

Then he looked at me critically. He examined my hands and face carefully as if he thought to find something wrong about me. My flesh must be different, something must be imperfect in it, but he could find no flaw.

"It is fair, even as hers," he murmured.

"Why should anything be wrong with me?" I asked.

"Oh, Elsa, child, I don't know!" he answered, in a bewildered way. "I don't know where my thoughts are taking me. I have always held such stern rules of duty before me. Duty, the formal submission to duty, that's it. I have held to the letter of duty, and now to face you, the child of my love, bewilders me. It almost seems as if something must be wrong with you, though God knows our love was pure, my darling's and mine. One hour I forgot duty and took love to my bosom and it brought you. It bewilders me.

"The letter of the law, Elsa, that is what I have always lived by—the letter of the law. I held to it that God and the world demanded the sacrifice of my heart. Are you happy, child? Has your life been a beautiful one?"

"Oh, so beautiful!" I cried eagerly. "All happiness, no cloud, dear father, to mar it, until the night of your musical, when I first saw your face. But that cloud is disappearing, now that I can claim you mine," and I looked up at him fearlessly.

"God is love, father," I whispered, and he looked at me intently as I spoke, as if the light were flooding his soul.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Gradually the deep lines left his forehead, and calmness settled over his countenance. It grew upon him as we talked, as if peace had entered his soul.

"You are like the picture in her desk now," I said, looking up at him.

"And you knew me because of that?" he questioned, and then his voice took on a far-away, dreamy accent as he went on, "I remember the picture. I painted it for her one day as we sat in the studio, a rainy afternoon. She wore a blue dress, that I loved; it was the color of her eyes. Ah, I remember her, that gloomy day. She was beautiful. The whole world was in the depths of her dear eyes for me. It was late when she left me, my beloved," he murmured as he rambled on, giving me glimpses of the sweet moments that united them.

"And you knew me at the musical?" he repeated, going back in his thought.

"At once," I answered.

"Poor child," he said, and patted my hand lovingly. I had banished the horror of his thought, and he was beginning to piece the broken bits of his life together.

"We loved—your mother and I. Our love was pure and sweet. Then I painted the picture, there

upon the wall. It took a hold upon her that made me wonder. She lingered hungrily before it for hours. I remember so well the day it was finished. I left the room for a moment, and when I returned it had my darling completely under its spell. She clung to me piteously, whispered words of love into my ears. Her voice was mesmeric, her whole soul was in it. It flooded my senses and I drank in the sweetness of love from her lips eagerly, as one faint and thirsty upon a desert.

"A madness was upon me as I listened to the low murmur of her voice. 'Let us go away,' she begged, 'just for a day, a week. Take me on the water far from the noisy pavements. Let us seek the island of love and moor our boat to its shore.' I could not resist her pleading," he went on, a look of rapturous memory creeping into his eyes as he revealed the secrets of his heart to me. "I had just finished painting my greatest picture, the full glamour of success was upon me, and I loved her, Elsa, I loved her, even as she loved me.

"We slipped away and were lost from the world. I had a sailboat, I stocked her with food, and made ready to receive my darling. She came to me at evening, the sunset in her hair, her eyes radiant with happiness, and we drifted away from the haunts of men. The great waves rocked us into an oblivion of such perfect joy, that I have never realized its like again.

"But we awoke, and looked into each others' souls. She penetrated the secret recesses of my thought, and one morning when I sought her after our return to the whirl of life she was gone."

He ceased speaking, arose, and went over to a desk in the corner of the room unlocked a secret drawer and took out a letter, yellow and worn, and gave it to me. It was my mother's handwriting, and I fingered the pages tenderly, and my voice was low and indistinct as I read the closely written sentences aloud at his bidding.

"My heart has touched yours, and I was awake to its quick throbbings. A deep subtle understanding has penetrated my being. I wear no cloak of regret. I love you, and loving you, I go away that your love may ever remain true."

"She was gone, Elsa," he interrupted, "gone, and I knew not where to seek her. There was nothing to explain her flight but that little note." I had glanced up at his words, and now returned my eyes to the yellowing sheet of paper in my fingers and continued to read aloud:

"I have known the sweetness of you, and I am content. I cannot remain, now that we have unveiled our love," and that was all, only her name "Alta" at its close.

"I sought for her everywhere, child," he said, taking up the thread of our conversation. "My heart died in my breast, and I veiled the picture. I believe in God and the Bible, and a child thus begotten horrifies me. She had a deeper vision, Elsa, I feel that, as I sit here. How strange and fearful it all is. You, my little one, hurled into the world under such circumstances; I cannot bear it!

"The same problem is before me now that I faced twenty years ago. I cannot solve it, my brain whirls." I pushed him gently back upon the couch.

He did not resist me. He was tired with trying to solve the mystery of life. I knelt by his side and laid my head on his breast.

"There is but one thing that troubles me, father," I said, as my fingers stroked his forehead.

"And that, Elsa?" he asked tenderly.

"Is Charles Grey," I answered. "What will he say to all this?"

"Must he know, dear?" he asked, startled that I would expose our secret.

"Oh, yes!" I cried; "he is all the world to me. He is my world, and if he loves me in spite of my birth there is no other world to fret me. I have been reared to look into the problems that beset us." As I spoke, confidence grew upon me. I had the courage of my mother, as I said bravely: "There is no blackness of despair that the light of love cannot penetrate. There is no God that will hurl you, or my mother, or me, into a bottomless pit. Love is for the glad daylight of the flowers and green life—love is the glad world of expression, father, dear." He looked at me amazed as I continued: "The blackness that chokes out lives is repression. Nature gives her love full and free, and are we not greater than nature?"

I was taking him into realms of thought, his stern law-loving nature had never penetrated before. I would wipe away regret, and I continued as one inspired, while he listened with ever-increasing emotion.

"If I but knew!" he cried. "If I could push the curtain of life aside and see the pattern of it all."

He arose to a sitting posture. The lines about

his eyes were deep. He was suffering in spite of my effort. His fingers nervously rumbled his dark hair, and every few minutes his eyes would close, as if to catch some fleeting vision, or to still the wild surging of emotion within his heart. It was growing late. Already the shadows were creeping over the window ledge. I gently drew his figure down upon the couch. Once again my hand lay upon his brow.

"Sleep, father, dear, I must go, or be late for the opening. Sleep—and in your dreaming the vision will speak. You can follow the pattern more closely in the silence." I kissed him upon his lips, so long lonely for her kiss—my mother's.

"Our dear lady back in the little cottage, busy with her work, gives you that kiss," I whispered. He pressed me close to him, then his arms fell away and he yielded to my pleading like a tired child. I stole quietly to the door. Would the light come and lead him out of the darkness and cold, into the peace of understanding? I drew the door gently shut.

My whole being was hushed into a wonderful calm as I turned my face toward the hotel. Upon every side the hurrying throng jostled by; a mass of people, groping and struggling even as he, lying still and quiet in the shadow-filled studio.

CHAPTER XXX.

Thirty minutes had hardly elapsed when I was in my own little room at the hotel, holding in my hand a small package. Darkness almost veiled the place and I quickly turned the light on, that I might satisfy my curiosity, concerning the square bundle in my hand. I cut the strings and tore the wrappings away. The handwriting was unknown. There is a joy attending the satisfaction of one's curiosity. Life had seemed wrong of late, and there was diversion in this tiny bundle. I drew away the last layer of paper and disclosed a likeness of my mother.

"She has remembered," I said aloud. I had never possessed a photograph of her, and it pleased me that she had gratified my wish. I did not need a likeness to bring her face before me. I had but to close my eyes, thus shutting out intervening objects, then draw a veil between the outside world and my inner vision, and her face was before me.

But this was a treasure, this delicate outlining that gave her countenance to me. I could look deep into her eyes and a smile rose out of the cardboard that cleared away the perplexity which had preyed upon my heart.

"She is even nearer than when in my thought," I murmured.

There was a different look, some way, in the

face now, since the veil of her life had been torn away, and I, her child, knew all. I had almost been forced to sit in judgment upon my dear one, and I trembled since I had really entered the holy place of her love. How high the forehead, and the lips were warm and red.

"Dear mother, you are beautiful to me," I whispered as I gazed at my treasure.

Suddenly *his* face rose before me. In my reverie I saw my father lying alone in the studio. He was groping for the way in the silence of sleep. His fingers were reaching to outline the pattern of his life. Would the spirit fingers guide him and hold the scheme of life before him; trace for his bewildered brain the pattern of it all?

A great love for my mother came welling into my heart as I stood gazing at her face. I would have her happy, and yet sorrow had transformed her into such sweet womanhood. Sorrow had dwelt ever in her life, but she had never grown bitter in its pain. There is a note of melody to be heard, if we but listen, when crushed and helpless we turn to the Infinite One—a note of such sweet cadence that when we hear it, though all the path seem lonely ahead, we are glad even in our grief.

I sighed as I put the picture upon the table, and then a wonderful resolve came to me, an inspiration that prompted me to eager action. I gathered together the few things I needed, took a quick glance at the clock, and, putting the photograph into my handbag, hurried out of the door to the elevator and into the street.

I hailed a passing cab and was driven back to

the studio of George Carton. It was only a short distance, but I had no time to lose. I bade the cabby wait while I ascended to the top story and silently made my way to the painter's rooms.

At last I reached the door; it alone stood between us, and a terror seized me. Our relationship was so newly established, could I be so bold as to open the door without knocking? "Yes, I must," I cried. If he still slept it would be all right, and if awake I could explain. Something told me that he slept, and I held my breath as I slowly and carefully turned the knob.

Gradually I let the knob slip back in my hand, and then quietly, breathlessly, I entered the room. The place was enveloped in darkness, yet a few remaining rays of twilight lingered over the window-sill—just a flickering shaft of silver to soften the hard blackness of night.

I stole over the thick rugs, my feet making no sound, and reached the couch where he lay, without disturbing him. For one moment I stood silent there, marveling at the nobility of the face beneath my eyes. The lines of care were gone, erased by invisible fingers. The mouth was curved into a smile. One hand lay on his breast, and near it I placed the small photograph of my mother.

No subtle desire prompted the bringing of her picture, yet I had unconsciously penetrated the heart of his dreams. Did I plan to incline his thought toward her? I hardly knew. I had but obeyed an impulse born of my love for her, and from the circle of her love I had naturally reached out to him—the

man who for so many years had influenced her thought and mine.

I bent over and kissed the dark hair lying in disorder upon his brow, then retraced my steps to the door. I trembled lest I should make a false move and awaken him. When the door was again closed between us I breathed a sigh of relief.

The thought of eating in a public café grew repugnant to me as I stood outside in the chill night air. I would go direct to the theatre and make some tea there on an alcohol stove I had in my dressing room. I was not hungry, anyway. It was only to keep the faintness under subjection that I endured even the thought of tea.

I sprang into the cab and was hurried along through the streets, the cabby urging his half-starved animal to extra speed in the hope of another dollar with a return passenger. We reached the theatre. I paid him, and he was off, the thud of iron-rimmed hoofs sending back an echo that had only the note of pain in it.)

Poor creatures, my heart bled for the horses, weighed down with the responsibility of a heavy vehicle on their shoulders. Poor, faithful, plodding beasts! I picked my way to the dimly lighted entrance; it was still early, and the bustle about the box office had not commenced. I stepped into the half-darkened corridor.

I knew the way, and so had no difficulty in finding the door of my dressing room. Liza had been ill, and I had told her to remain at home to-night, but the place setmed lonesome without her.

I turned on the light and laid aside my hat and

coat. There were some crackers in a bag on the shelf. I took them down, then drew some water. It was soon boiling, and I had the tea made and a cup filled, fragrant and hot, in my hand.

As I sat sipping it I heard a noise outside my door. It startled me at first. It was rather an awful thought, the great empty building beyond my vision. I listened intently, placing the cup on a small table. It was a step, and I opened the door recklessly that I might still the beating of my heart and know quickly the shape of the fear that rose before me from the outside.

As I threw wide the door I almost fell into the arms of Charles Grey.

"I had to come, Elsa," he said, taking both my hands impulsively.

The expression on his face was sad, and the lids drooped far over his eyes. My dear boy had suffered. He held my hands, and I let them remain passive in his grasp. I was tired of struggling. He drew me into his arms, and I let him. I was worn out, and new courage entered my being, my heart next to his.

Closer, still closer he drew me, and I made no effort to free myself. My head lay on his breast, he bent his face to mine. It was heaven to rest in his arms, to look out upon life from the shelter of his breast and feel no fear. I was young, and the blood coursed through my veins like mad. Life, life, was upon every side of us. All her treasures were about us, we had but to stretch our hands for them. Can one describe the happiness when the essence of joy, the joy of being, is first set free within

us? When life becomes so sweet that it possesses us with its wonder and we forget all else; the blood tingles, pulses thrill, lips quiver, and we would express the mystery within. Love freed becomes a flame, burns to a white heat, that does not consume.

All this went surging through my being as I felt his breath near mine. Then his voice broke the spell as he whispered:

"My precious one, how she has suffered, and I never knew until last night. Will you forgive me, dearest?" and he held me closer still.

I could not speak, I could only feel, yet I raised my eyes to his, and then his lips were upon my lips, the world was forgotten, the magic of love was over, and under, and about me. Then I drew away from his embrace and looked into his eyes. He met my gaze frankly.

"You know of my birth?" I cried.

"I know, Elsa," he answered, putting his arms about me and drawing me to a small sofa in the room.

"How could you fear my knowing, my darling? I love you, love you. Nothing could separate us or change that love. If you but love me there is nothing else can matter."

He whispered the words close to my ear, and his face was aglow with tenderness. I let his arms close round me, a barrier that shut out the world.

"Do you love me?" he whispered. "Say the words, Elsa."

("I do love you.")

"Thank God for that," he murmured, as his dear hand lay on my hair.

"And my father," I whispered, "is George Carton, the painter."

I wanted him to know. I wanted both my dear ones to enter into my happy hour and the naming of them seemed to bring them there.

He kissed my lips, and fear went out of my life in that moment forever. The universe beyond my dressing room faded away. Only as shadows the myriad of human beings moved about me. The real world was here, and I lay in its arms. The real throbbing heart of life for me was here, and I felt its quick beat against my breast.

"Say it again, dearest," whispered a voice. 'Twas the voice of my dreams. It came to me as from a great distance, as a note of music that I longed to hear. I only looked my answer; he caught me to his breast and kissed me.

"I have dreamed what it could mean to be loved by you," he said, "to have your eyes speak the words that have haunted me, to have—— But say the words, Elsa, whisper them, your lips to mine," and my heart answered to the quick throbbing of his as I murmured "I love you."

THE VISION.

The last flickering rays of twilight touched the outer edge of the window frame that opened into the studio. The room was enveloped in darkness, only the quivering fingers of the sun reached through the casement at intervals, to caress lovingly the sleeping form of a man upon a fur-covered couch. The yellow light, now growing faint and pale, lay over the silent figure mingling with the hair that fell in loose disorder about the white brow. Then slowly, reluctantly the glory of the glad world crept away, leaving the place in darkness.

Gradually a deep, deep blackness enveloped the room, unbroken by any murmur of outward voices. The troubled sleeper lay still and quiet, glad of oblivion. Suddenly an apparition, born of his dreaming, appeared before him. The figure was as a soft radiance that blended with the darkness, was a part of it.

Hush! Above the sleeping man it bent, lower and lower, until the intensity of its gaze reached the consciousness of the individual prone upon the couch.

"Arise," said the spirit, "the God of Love and Life calleth for thy presence, and the woman whom thou tookest to wife."

Slowly consciousness returned—the *man remem-*

bered. A deep peace fell upon him, and he arose to obey the voice that echoed through the silence. He sought the woman he called wife, and, taking her hand in his, started on his journey to the realm of the Gods. He was glad he had been summoned, now he would know the truth, he would see the pattern of his life.

Sorrow fell away as he journeyed on, a triumphant glow enlightened his countenance. He could hear the "Well done." The experiences through which he had passed in his sojourn upon the earth rose before him. He viewed them calmly. The morning of his youth, the wonderful expectancy that had filled his breast as a boy, the bigger, surer vision that had appeared in his larger manhood, and now the years of fulfillment.

He pondered over them all as he went on, the woman by his side. At last he neared the presence of the God of Love and Life who had summoned him. Dimly at first he received hints of the beauty that lay in the path before him. There came stealing nearer fragmentary glimpses of the heights toward which his eyes had been lifted since his youth. Slowly it dawned upon him, like the unfolding of a beautiful dream, the light that was beyond penetrated his soul. In the distance divinely fair he beheld the throne where sat the Wonderful One.

Gently he guided the steps of the woman that her feet might press only into pleasant ways. There were deep lines in his face, but a sweetness lay upon his countenance, like a halo. The woman by his side was marvelously beautiful. Through the turmoil, the fret of life, he had guided her, ever lead-

ing her along a blossom-strewn path, thus youth kept her step buoyant, her form radiant and beautiful beyond expression.

He had shielded her from sorrow, and her eyes were as clear pools reflecting only the charm of this world. Though she looked out upon life about her, she was as one blind. Beauty was reflected there, yet she saw not the glory that was everywhere. The cries of the creatures that trod the valley near her had never penetrated her being. Agony of soul meant nothing to her. She had never been awakened, never penetrated the veil that lay over the mystery of being. It had never been drawn aside that she might carry the thrill of another bigger sphere in her heart.

Step by step they journeyed on, her hand in the palm of his. She was gowned as a queen, the robe that fell about her with rare ingenious skill had been fashioned—all the richness of the world was woven into its texture. She was arrayed in the glory of earth.

"What wouldst thou bring into my presence?" said the God of Love and Life.

"It is duty," answered the man. "It is the woman who was given me to wife. Behold, I have brought her into thy presence, no blemish upon her brow. She has never known sorrow," and the man drew himself up in his pride.

"What is that which thou carriest in thy left hand so tightly?" asked the Royal One.

"It is my heart," answered the man.

"But why so small," questioned the God, and the traveler replied:

"I have held it close. I have never allowed it to breathe or expand. Else it would have reached out beyond the horizon which bound it."

A compassionate look spread over the countenance of the God.

"I have ever sacrificed to duty," went on the man, "and starved my heart into submission."

When the pilgrim ceased speaking a sublime silence enveloped them. Far in the distance stretched vistas of a radiant world that lay beyond the throne, inaccessible till the journey was at an end.

"What of the woman's soul?" demanded a voice calm and stern.

The man trembled and was afraid. No answer came to his white lips, and he trembled to the centre of his being, as a deeper significance of his journey was disclosed to his heart.

"Take this and drink," said the Mighty One, holding out a cup filled to the brim with red wine. He drank eagerly as one athirst. Suddenly his eyes saw into the hidden places of earth. He traced the pattern of his life and knew the mistakes of his weaving.

He penetrated the worldly garb of the woman by his side. He saw her soul, a misshapen mass, a dim shadow but faintly outlined. It was leaving her body, and he reached out eagerly and cried aloud in his anguish.

"Leave the woman her soul, oh, God of Love and Life!" and then, as he would have fainted in his distress, an angel appeared clothed in white, a thorn-branch in his hand.

"Take this," said the angel, "and pierce the woman's heart."

The pilgrim shrank into himself, closed his eyes, and murmured:

"Her heart? I cannot make her suffer by any deed of mine."

"Pierce her heart with the thorn-branch," reiterated the angel. The pilgrim opened his eyes, and they were filled with tears, a terrible agony lay in their depths. The woman's soul was floating beyond her. Great sobs shook the man's frame, and he cried aloud once again in agony:

"I cannot wound her. I must do my duty. I have sworn to shelter and protect, I cannot pierce her heart!"

The angel stood before him silent and held out the thorn-branch. The woman's soul grew fainter, fainter, more sickly, a pale, dim light.

"Pierce her heart," said the angel, and the man took the thorn-branch as one in a trance, and obeyed.

Suddenly the gown of her worldly perfection fell away from her. As it disappeared she turned from the man by her side and into her face crept a strange new loveliness, and the man marveled and called aloud to her:

"Don't you know me, woman?"

"Restrain me not," she answered, and her voice was low and full of tenderness. a voice he had never heard before. "I must away, many need the touch of my fingers," she cried.

"It is my wife!" cried the man as consciousness returned. "I have wounded her beyond recovery, she does not know me," he added, kneeling humbly

at the throne of the God of Love and Life.

"Thou hast given back her soul, and behold thy heart! How it is already great."

A glorious light surrounded the traveler, and as the God spoke his form grew erect and strong.

"Be not dismayed, O trembling one! Thy heart would lead thee into the path of love. Follow thy heart, weary pilgrim. It is well," said the God

Upon the face of the sleeping man appeared a slowly dawning consciousness. He rose to a sitting posture. A great peace was upon him. His eyes held in their gaze a deeper vision; the radiant loveliness of another world was in their dark depths.

Through the window of the studio shone the moon, a sheen of glory that gave new beauty to everything. The place was transformed, and a great craving awoke in the heart of the dreaming one. He had just been recalled from a nightmare of pain and suffering and bidden to weave the golden thread of love into the pattern of his life.

The night-dark sky would never be impenetrable again. The path stretched beautiful before him, while still there echoed through the room as a song lingers the words:

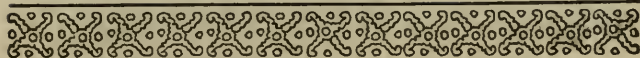
"Thy heart would lead thee into the path of love. Follow thy heart."

It was the voice of the God of Love and Life. A smile of infinite sweetness spread over the man's countenance.

In his hands he held the portrait of a woman with the sunlight in her hair.

THE END.

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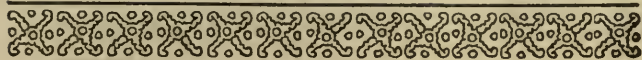
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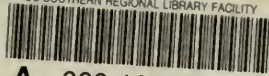
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